

Caplan, Neil. *The Lausanne Conference, 1949: A Case Study in Middle East Peacemaking*. Occasional Papers 113, Tel-Aviv University: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1993.

In this interesting study Neil Caplan examines the attempts of the Lausanne Conference of 1949 to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian dilemma which resulted from the 1948 War of Independence. This monograph is divided into 13 chapters covering the different stages of the negotiations between the two countries. The negotiations were conducted through the mediation of the United Nations and the United States. It started with informal contacts between the parties and the mediators, then moved to the negotiation table where they were formally discussed. The meeting proceeded slowly and very little progress was made despite the efforts of the UN's Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) and the US to accelerate the process. Both Arab and Israeli negotiators failed to reach an agreement on the boundaries of the new Israeli state and the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to the homeland. The Arab representatives insisted that Israel must renounce its claim to all land it occupied in 1948 and withdraw to the boundaries of 1947. In addition, they insisted that Israel allow all Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. The Israeli representatives argued that Israel alone could not be expected to absorb all refugees. Israel's offer to solve the refugee problem by concentrating them in the Gaza Strip and incorporating the area into the Jewish state triggered a demand that Israel make a concession to Egypt by ceding a part of the Negev. The Israeli representatives were unwilling to hear such a proposal and agreed to repatriate no more than 100,000. Both UN and US pressure failed to produce results. Both became the target of criticism by Arabs and Israelis alike.

In his conclusion on the reasons for the failure of the Lausanne Conference Caplan gives an in-depth analysis of the reasons. This indeed, was done with consummate skill. The author has thoroughly explored the historiography on this topic, compared and contrasted the views of those who had written about the topic and provided an analytical and refreshing outlook on the subject.

According to the author, the conference's failure was due to the following reasons. First was the basic intransigence of both sides who were convinced that time was on their side. Second was the Arab attempt to pressure the Jewish state to repatriate the refugees rather than to sign a peace treaty with it. Finally, was Israel's attempt to stall in order to consolidate its military gains of 1948-49.

Dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict, one can easily come to a one-sided conclusion. Losing a sense of objectivity is common to many historians and commentators on this topic. It is quite admirable that Caplan does not fall into this trap. His presentation lacks the bias which one often finds in the literature on the topic.

Caplan deals with all the factors that could have possibly failed at the Lausanne Conference. He deals with the blame which was cast against the PCC which, as some historians argued, suffered from weaknesses inherent in the three

bodies, as opposed to a single mediator, whose actions were subject to interference from their governments. He concludes by saying that there is no evidence that the PCC's members were hampered or incapable of carrying out their mission due to pressure exerted by their governments. Likewise, he states that the argument that the PCC members were incompetent, weak and incapable of harnessing their home governments to the negotiating process has no real proof. The argument that the personalities involved in the negotiating process were unfit for the task also receives attention here. The tendency of the Israelis to compare all negotiators to Ralph Bunche and the dismissal of these negotiators by critics such as Ahmad Shuqayri, as a "collection of retired diplomats" and "left-overs" from bygone eras, is also challenged here. Even if true, Caplan argues, the relative incompetence of the negotiators cannot alone account for the failure of the conference. Rather than blaming the PCC commissioners' inability to convince the Arabs to agree to a face-to-face meeting with Israel, Caplan attributes this failure to the determination of the Arabs to use political and tactical maneuvering in order to create a common front capable of forcing on the Israelis acceptance of their demands. Rather than blame the US for its lack of a clear policy regarding the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Caplan sees the failure of American diplomacy in the area as a result of the complexity of the issues and the obstinacy of the parties involved. Contrary to what many historians claim, the US did pressure the Israelis to moderate their stand and there was an attempt made by the State Department to pursue an even policy.

The author does not identify a culprit. This is a genuine attempt to explore a controversial topic in an objective manner. Both primary and secondary sources are used and the author seems to have made good use of them. The only possible shortcoming is the fact that the author devotes little attention to British interests and Britain's role in the negotiations. It seems somewhat surprising that Great Britain, which occupied the area until 1948, and whose defense policy in the area east of Suez remained basically intact until 1957, would have such little input. It is possible that this aspect remained inadequately explored. Apart from this shortcoming this study is a valuable addition to the literature on the topic. It can be useful for the scholar and the layman alike.

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