

they had witnessed. A real strength of the work is Neumahr's treatment of the typically overlooked female journalists. Housed separately from the men, Gellhorn, West, Flanner, and Erika Mann frequently added a feminist critique to both Nazism and the trials. Written in a lively and accessible style, the book is a bestseller in Germany. Overall, *Das Schloss der Schriftsteller* offers a multi-perspective view of the trials, the question of German guilt, and the impact of both on the journalists who gathered in Nuremberg.

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## **Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945-1949**

**By Jeffrey Herf. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.  
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The birth of the State of Israel in May 1948 took place during a brief interlude between the end of the Second World War and the full onset of the Cold War. This short period, when the recent memory of the Holocaust was still acutely felt by major political players, and which lasted from the fall of 1947 until the spring of 1949, became "Israel's Moment," as Jeffrey Herf argues in his thoroughly researched study. It was during these years that the question of Palestine, which had until that moment been mostly a triangular affair between the British, the Zionists, and Palestinian Arabs, internationalized and became part of the transition from the anti-Nazi alliance to hardening Cold War antagonisms.

Perhaps surprisingly, Herf reminds us that Jewish statehood came about not because of, but rather *in spite of*, American political meddling. Public historical amnesia has nourished the image of a long-established U.S.-Israeli friendship, which in reality was nowhere to be found until much later, after the 1967 Six-Day War. Rather, during the years 1947-1949 the strongest support for the Zionist state-building project came from the Soviet Bloc. This support was voiced most explicitly by Soviet, Ukrainian, and Polish representatives at United Nations gatherings, and was demonstrated in practice by the Czechoslovak breach of the U.S.-initiated arms embargo during the Arab-Israeli war. However, soon thereafter this episode was pushed to the background of public recollection: already in 1949, Stalin rapidly changed course vis-à-vis Israel. Part of this volte-face was an active campaign on the part of Stalin and his subsidiaries to erase the memory of earlier Soviet support.

As for the United States, Herf demonstrates how the State Department and the Pentagon consistently labelled the creation of a Jewish State as a threat to American strategic and security interests. U.S. foreign policy continued to side with Britain's anti-Zionist policies, despite wider popular and both Democrat and Republican political opinion rapidly shifting in favour of the Zionists. The main reasons for this attitude were the convictions of several key U.S. figures, most notably Secretary of State George Marshall and first director of the Policy Planning Staff, George Kennan. The latter explicitly connected opposition to the Jewish State to the U.S.'s prime political aim: containment of communism. Viewed through this Cold War lens, the strong Soviet-led support that the Zionists were receiving was more than suspicious, and the fear arose that antagonizing the Arab world would push the Arabs into the Soviet sphere of influence. Finally, antisemitic anxieties about Soviet infiltrators

amongst new arrivals to the Middle East complemented the anti-Zionist cocktail. It is not hard to distinguish classic antisemitic tropes related to the Judeo-Bolshevik myth in this reasoning. In light of the overwhelming evidence he himself presents, Herf's conclusion that these attitudes were not expressions of conscious antisemitism remains somewhat puzzling.

Eventually, Herf states, the combination of U.S. public opinion and Soviet backing, as well as the valuable political support of a reelected President Harry Truman prevented Zionist defeat. Unlike his security establishment, Truman was able to combine the "passions of two eras"—anti-Nazi and anticommunist feelings—which came together in his support for UN Resolution 181 in November 1947, which put forward the Palestine partition plan (436). By contrast, the State Department moved towards an ill-formulated UN trusteeship plan, and in 1948 initially only allowed for *de facto* and not *de jure* U.S. recognition of the State of Israel.

Herf devotes a lot of space to the international failure to bring to trial the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, who was a wartime Nazi collaborator and remained an important Palestinian leader in exile after the war. Herf suggests that, had al-Husseini been indicted, a more moderate Palestinian leadership in his stead may have accepted the 1947 partition plan, preventing ensuing protracted warfare. Other scholars, most notably David Motadel, have in recent years downplayed the Mufti's importance in the Holocaust. Especially in the context of the wider ambition of Herf's book to discuss the international responses to the establishment of Israel, al-Husseini's subsequent role does seem overstated. It is hard to escape the impression that Herf's extensive earlier work on the Mufti has been over-included in the current work.

A similar mismatch between the book's stated aim and the analytical focus of the study manifests itself in the fact that most of Herf's narrative actually deals with American politics. Admittedly, Herf does offer illuminating insights into the complex French engagement with Palestine, especially during the 1947 Exodus affair. We also learn some interesting facts about the wide support in French society for Zionism, shared by communists, socialists, Gaullists, and radicals alike. Nevertheless, by and large the book is about U.S. foreign policy. The virtual absence of the Czechoslovak diplomatic point of view in connection to its illegal arms supplies to Israel is also particularly glaring and could have done with more explicit legitimization.

Also striking is Herf's relatively uncritical attitude vis-à-vis Zionist policies in Palestine: Zionist plans for the Jewish state are portrayed as inherently antiracist, democratic, and multiethnic. The depiction of Israel's immediate response to the flight of thousands of Palestinians as being open to an eventual return of these refugees is, to put it mildly, naïve. The less benevolent Zionist attitude towards Palestinian refugees has by now been well-documented, and Herf's analysis therefore obtains an air of Zionist apologetics, which distracts from the great qualities of the book.

In spite of these shortcomings, *Israel's Moment* is a monumental study of an extremely critical geopolitical moment with lasting global effects. "Israel's Moment" was not only a crucial setback for British imperialism and an important turning point in U.S. foreign policy, but also very much a "United Nations Moment": Resolution 181 was the first of its kind, and the Security Council rapidly transformed into one of the first battlegrounds of the Cold War. Perhaps Herf's most significant contribution is his important reminder that the global Left's engagement with Israel was once radically different: until 1949 in Eastern Europe and until 1967 in the West, the Left overwhelmingly supported Zionism. Recognizing this fact is crucial for a more nuanced understanding of the true meaning of the history of leftist politics.

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