



The New R E P U B L I C



THE IGNORANCE AT THE HEART OF INNUENDO And Now For Some Facts

by **Benny Morris**

I.

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt's "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" is a nasty piece of work. Some of what they assert regarding the terrorist tactics of certain Zionist groups during the 1930s, and the atrocities committed by Israeli troops in the War of 1948, and the harsh Israeli measures against the Palestinians during the second intifada, and certain activities of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States over the past decades--some of this is correct, and I realize as I write this sentence that it will henceforth be trotted out by the Mearsheimers and Walts of the world, as by their Arab admirers, while they omit the previous sentence and all that now follows. But what these distinguished professors have produced is otherwise depressing to anyone who values intellectual integrity.

Mearsheimer and Walt build their case mainly by means of omission: they tell certain facts while omitting others, sometimes more apt and crucial. And occasionally they distort facts and figures. The thesis of their study, which was supported by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, is that America's support of Israel runs contrary to American national interests, and that it is not grounded in "a compelling moral case." To establish the latter contention, they deny that Israel is the weaker party in the Arab-Israeli conflict; and that it is a democracy; and that "Israel's conduct has been morally superior to [that of] its adversaries."

In order to highlight the authors' methodology and to give an accurate picture of their scholarship, I wish to focus on several historical points that they make to sustain their case. (I will leave it to others to show what should be perfectly obvious: that the pro-Israel lobby is not the conspiratorial tail that wags the American dog.) I must confess to a personal interest in the matter. Like many pro-Arab propagandists at work today, Mearsheimer and Walt often cite my own books, sometimes quoting directly from them, in apparent corroboration of their arguments. Yet their work is a travesty of the history that I have studied and written for the past two decades. Their work is riddled with shoddiness and defiled by mendacity. Were "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" an actual person, I would have to say that he did not have a single honest bone in his body.

II.

I will begin with the question of the balance of forces between Israel and the Arab world--a political-military issue with moral overtones, because it begs the question of who in this conflict was, and remains, the underdog deserving of Western sympathy.

Mearsheimer and Walt write that "Israel is often portrayed as weak and besieged, a Jewish David surrounded by a hostile Arab Goliath ... but the opposite image is closer to the truth." For some reason, weakness is commonly seen as entailing moral superiority, an illogical proposition.

I would recommend that they take a look at any atlas and yearbook for the key years of the conflict--1948, 1956, 1967, 1973. Even a child would notice that the Arab world, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, does actually "surround" Israel and is infinitely larger than the eight-thousand-square-mile Jewish state (which is the size of New Hampshire). He would notice also that the population of the confrontation states--Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq, who were often joined in their wars with Israel by expeditionary forces from Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Yemen--has always been at least twenty times greater than Israel's; and in 1948 it was about fifty times greater. The material resources of the Arab world similarly have been (as they still are) infinitely larger than Israel's.

It is true that Israel's "organizational ability" has enabled it to concentrate and focus its resources where they count in wartime, on the successive battlefields, with far greater efficiency than the Arabs; and it is true that Israel's troops, and especially its officer corps, have always been of a far higher caliber than the Arabs' counterparts; and it is true that the motivation of Israel's troops--often with their backs to the wall--has generally been superior to that of their Arab foes. But this is still a far cry from implying, as Mearsheimer and Walt do, regarding the war in 1947-1949, that Israel won its wars because "the Zionists had larger, better-equipped" forces than the Arabs.

During the October (or Yom Kippur) War in 1973, the Egyptians mustered about one million men under arms, and their Syrian allies some 400,000, when they launched their surprise attacks across the Suez Canal and on the Golan Heights. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fielded 350,000 to 400,000 troops at most. The Israelis won that war because of superior "grit" and better quality of troops and organization, even though the wings of their better air force and tank corps were badly clipped by the Arabs' massive deployment of state-of-the-art missile shields.

As regards the war of 1948, the picture is more complex--but it is certainly not the picture painted by Mearsheimer and Walt of flat Israeli superiority. (I don't know about political science, but history--I mean good history--needs to account for complexity and nuance.) It is true that in the first part of the war, the "civil war" between the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine (from late November 1947 until May 14, 1948, when the state of Israel came into being), the Jews enjoyed a gradually mobilized military superiority, owed primarily to better organization and only marginally to an advantage in some types of weaponry (mortars and possibly machine guns). But the Palestinians probably had an

edge in light arms, the main armaments during the civil war. And they enjoyed the support of the 4,000-man Arab Liberation Army, consisting mainly of Syrian and Iraqi volunteers, which had field artillery, which the Yishuv--the Jewish community in Palestine--did not possess. Except in the last few weeks of the civil war, the Arabs probably had an overall edge in men-under-arms--say 15,000-30,000 to the Yishuv's 15,000-25,000; but they proved unable to bring the advantage to bear in the successive battlefields. The militiamen of Nablus and Hebron, where no fighting occurred, saw no reason to come to the aid of their embattled brothers in Jaffa and Haifa.

During the second and conventional phase of the war (mid-May 1948 to January 1949), which was fought between the invading armies of the Arab states--Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan (supplemented by Sudanese, Saudi, Yemeni, and Moroccan contingents)--and the newborn state of Israel, the Arab side began with an overwhelming, or what should have been an overwhelming, advantage in equipment and firepower. In the first fortnight of the invasion, the Arabs had more than seventy combat aircraft, Spitfires and Furies, and the Yishuv had none. (The Israelis assembled and sent into action their first four combat aircraft, Czech-built Messerschmidt 109s, on May 29, and lost two of them.) During the following months, the Arabs continued to enjoy an overwhelming advantage in combat aircraft. Until the end of June, certainly, the Arab invaders possessed a massive superiority in all other types of heavy weaponry: they deployed about two hundred standard armored fighting vehicles (Humbers, Daimlers, and Marmon Harringtons), many of them mounting two- and six-pounder cannon; dozens of tanks (Cruiser, Locust, Mark 6, and Renault); and dozens of artillery pieces. The Israelis had two tanks, one of them without a gun; and one, then two, batteries of light pre-World War I-vintage 65mm Mountain artillery; and makeshift armored cars, civilian trucks patched up with steel plates in Tel Aviv workshops.

During the following months, until the war's practical end in January 1949 (the war formally ended in a series of armistice agreements signed between February and July), the Arab edge in heavy weaponry gradually decreased, partly as a result of attrition and the failure to acquire spare parts and ammunition, and partly because of Israel's successful arms purchases in Czechoslovakia and the West. But at the end of hostilities the Arabs still had more fighter aircraft and tanks, and perhaps even artillery, than the Israelis--though they lacked the expertise to use them and, over time, progressively lacked the necessary spare parts and munitions to deploy them effectively. The Israelis managed to circumvent the international arms embargo that had been imposed on the Middle East; the Arabs tried to do so, but largely failed.

As for manpower, the picture of relative force remains somewhat murky. The reason for the incompleteness of our knowledge is simple. Israel's archives are open, and the figures for the Israeli side are clear and available; but the archives of all the Arab states, which are dictatorships, remain closed. Thus the figures about Arab military manpower at given stages of the war remain partial and tentative, based perforce mainly on IDF intelligence estimates. But according to the latest research, particularly the work of Amitzur Ilan and Yehoshua Ben-Aryeh and Asaf Agin, the invading Arab troops (in the third week of May 1948) numbered 22,000 to 28,000, bolstered by several thousand irregulars, while the

Haganah, the mainstream Zionist militia, which became the IDF on June 1, 1948, fielded some 27,000 to 30,000 troops, with another 6,000 elderly Home Guardsmen, and some 2,000 to 3,000 IZL members. (The IZL was the Irgun Zva'i Leumi, or National Military Organization, a terrorist-militia group of the Zionist right.) But the invading Arab forces were all combat troops, teeth formations, who were backed, in terms of logistics, training, and so on, by at least a similar number of rear-echelon base camp troops; whereas the Haganah figure includes both combat troops (all told, about 16,000 to 17,000) and rear echelon units.

In mid-October, the balance stood at 79,000-95,000 to 47,000-53,000 in favor of the Israelis, who vastly expanded their recruitment. But again, the figure for the Arabs represents the numbers engaged in Palestine, not the full roll call of the relevant Arab armies, with their rear echelons. (All these figures relate to ground forces; the air and naval forces of the two sides, which were negligible in terms of manpower and importance, are omitted.) It is perhaps worth adding that in 1948 Israel suffered just over 6,000 dead, one-third of them civilians, out of a total population of 650,000 to 700,000--or one killed and two seriously wounded out of every hundred in the population--in the course of a year-long war that was launched, in two stages, by the Palestinian Arabs (in November-December 1947) and by the Arab states (in May 1948) after they had rejected the United Nations Partition Resolution of November 29, 1947. (Had America suffered a similar proportion of casualties in the Vietnam War, there would have been more than two million dead and four million wounded.) Arab losses in 1948 are uncertain. It is usually estimated that about 8,000 Palestinians died, and that the Arab armies' fatalities were about half that number.

So yes, Israel won each of its wars against the Arab states. But no, this was not because it had greater manpower or more equipment; it usually had less of each. The wars were decided by the failure of the significantly stronger and more populous Arab world to mobilize its resources or concentrate its forces where they counted, or to provide them with adequate leadership.

III.

This brings us to Israel's recent conflict with the Palestinians, on a lower level of intensity but still ongoing, and to its treatment by Mearsheimer and Walt. Without a doubt, the ratio of Israeli power to Palestinian power in 2000-2005, the years of the second intifada, was at least 100:1 in Israel's favor, in terms of raw conventional military strength. (This, without taking into account Israel's non-conventional military capabilities.) This intifada, this war, was launched by the Palestinians, who enjoyed the propaganda benefit of underdog status. The photograph of the disheveled stone-throwing or Kalashnikov-brandishing fighter facing down the Merkava Mark-III main battle tank became a representative image of this conflict. But it was a misleading representation. For the fearsome Merkava tanks almost never used their firepower against the Palestinians, much as the IAF F-16s and Apache attack helicopters usually (but not always) attacked empty Palestinian public buildings or individual terrorists in cars. The Hamas and Fatah fighters operated from behind a shield of Palestinian civilians and from crowded urban refugee

camps and neighborhoods, and so Israel fought with both hands tied behind its back. Its actual firepower--its tanks, aircraft, and cannon--was never unleashed.

This accounts for the relatively low number of Arab deaths (four thousand in five years of warfare), and the relatively low proportion of Arab to Jewish deaths (3.5:1), as compared with the actual calculus of Israeli versus Arab military strength (100:1) and the relative proportion of armed to unarmed Arab casualties (about 2:1). Most of the Arabs killed in the intifada, despite the fact that it was mostly fought in heavily populated Arab areas, were armed fighters, not civilians. And the ratio of armed to unarmed Arab casualties has steadily risen in recent years as the IDF has perfected its modus operandi and become more careful. The famous battle of the Jenin refugee camp in spring 2002 is an illuminating example. Arab lies and gullible journalism about an indiscriminate slaughter notwithstanding (Human Rights Watch and other non-partisan bodies subsequently upheld the Israeli version), only fifty-three Jeninites died, all but five or six of them armed combatants. Israel lost twenty-three infantrymen in the battle. Had Israel dealt with that Fatah-Hamas bastion as, say, the Russians dealt with Grozny--from afar, with massive ground and aerial bombardments--no Israeli lives would have been lost, and Jenin would no longer be standing.

Throughout the second intifada, Israeli policy was to avoid, so far as possible, harm to non-combatants, and the IDF generally took great operational care to avoid civilian casualties. Some "collateral damage" did occur, given the nature of the battlefield. Some Israeli soldiers were trigger-happy and exceeded orders. But generally the targeted killing of terrorists--who see themselves, quite correctly, as soldiers in a war, and hence are legitimate targets for attack--resulted in few civilian casualties. (The Israeli air and artillery attacks in Gaza earlier this month offer a characteristic example: of eighteen Arabs killed, fifteen or sixteen, by Palestinian admission, were combatants.)

On the other hand, during the second intifada Arab attacks on Israelis claimed twice as many civilians' lives as soldiers' lives. (Mearsheimer and Walt bury this fact in a footnote, without explanation.) This was a result of deliberation and intention, not accident. Throughout the intifada, Hamas, Fatah, and Islamic Jihad primarily targeted "soft" civilian targets (buses, restaurants, shopping malls, and last week a Tel Aviv falafel kiosk), preferring them to "hard" military targets, which were more difficult and more dangerous. The Palestinian objective was to sow terror in Israel's rear areas. The difference in strategy, and all that this implies in terms of moral orientation, was stark. The Palestinian aim was to kill as many civilians as possible; and the Palestinian masses rejoiced in the streets of Gaza and Ramallah every time a suicide bomber successfully blew up a bus or a shopping mall or a café in Israel. And this, historically speaking, was merely a refinement of the Palestinian tactics of terror used against the Yishuv since the 1920s (and not, as Arab propagandists would have it, only after 1967).

The IDF's aim, by contrast, was to kill guerrillas/terrorists and their commanders, such as Sheik Ahmed Yassin. Mearsheimer and Walt misleadingly call him the "spiritual" head of Hamas. One might, with equal accuracy, call Hitler the "spiritual" head of the Nazi Party. Neither actually murdered anyone with his bare hands. But their differences

notwithstanding, both were the organizational and operational directors of their respective movements, as well as the movements' "spiritual" leaders.

IV.

In their survey of the conflict's history, Mearsheimer and Walt write that "the mainstream Zionist leadership was not interested in establishing a bi-national state or accepting a permanent partition of Palestine ... To achieve this goal [of turning all of Palestine into a sovereign Jewish state], the Zionists had to expel large numbers of Arabs from the territory that would eventually become Israel. There was simply no other way to accomplish their objective. ... This opportunity came in 1947-1948, when Jewish forces drove up to 700,000 Palestinians into exile. ... The fact that the creation of Israel entailed a moral crime against the Palestinian people was well understood by Israel's leaders." Let us examine these assertions one by one.

Mearsheimer and Walt are implicitly arguing that the Zionist movement never really wanted or accepted a compromise--at the very least, that the Jewish national movement was no different from the Palestinian national movement, which always demanded a one-state solution and rejected a compromise based on partition. Now, it is true that Zionism sought the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, not a bi-national state in which Jews would enjoy minority status in yet another Muslim-Arab land or in which there would be temporary Jewish-Muslim parity--which, as everybody understood, given the high Arab birth rate, would quickly be transformed into a state with an Arab majority and a Jewish minority. But the acceptance or non-acceptance of partition is another matter. Mearsheimer and Walt imply that down to (and maybe even beyond) 1948, the Zionist leadership rejected the partition of Palestine. This is simply false, no matter what misleading quotations they cull from eminent Israeli historians.

Until 1936-1937, certainly, the Zionist mainstream sought to establish a Jewish state over all of Palestine. But something began to change fundamentally during the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, which was conducted against the background of resurgent anti-Semitism in Europe and the threat of genocide. In July 1937, the British royal commission headed by Lord Peel recommended the partition of Palestine, with the Jews to establish their own state on some 20 percent of the land and the bulk of the remainder to fall under Arab sovereignty (ultimately to be conjoined to the Emirate of Transjordan, ruled by the Emir Abdullah). The commission also recommended the transfer--by agreement or "voluntarily," and if necessary by force--of all or most of the Arabs from the area destined for Jewish statehood. The Zionist right, the Revisionist movement, rejected the proposals. But mainstream Zionism, representing 80 to 90 percent of the movement, was thrown into ferocious debate; and, shepherded by David Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leadership ended up formally accepting the principle of partition, if not the actual award of 20 percent of the land. The movement resolved that the Peel proposals were a basis for further negotiation.

It is true that Ben-Gurion harbored a hope, in 1937, that such a partition would be but a "first step," to be followed by eventual Zionist expansion throughout Palestine. But the

years that followed sobered Zionism and changed the movement's thinking. The movement's formal acceptance of the principle of partition was gradually digested and incorporated into the mentality of the Zionist mainstream, which understood that the Jewish people needed an immediate safe haven from European savagery, and that the movement would have to take what history was offering and could gain no more. The Jewish nationalist leaders called this "pragmatism."

By November 1947, the Zionists' reconciliation to a partial realization of their dreams was complete (except on the fringes of the movement), and Zionism's mainstream, led by Ben-Gurion and Weizmann, once and for all internalized the necessity of partition and accepted the U.N. partition resolution. The 1948 war was fought by Israel with a partitionist outlook, and it ended in partition (with the West Bank and East Jerusalem under Jordanian rule and the Gaza Strip controlled by Egypt), despite Israel's military superiority at its conclusion. During the following two decades, down to June 1967, there was a general acceptance by the Israeli mainstream of the fact, and the permanence, of partition.

As is well known, the Israeli victory and conquests of 1967 re-awakened the controversy about partition and for a time empowered the "Greater Israel" anti-partitionists, until their decline and fall, which began with Yitzhak Rabin's election to the premiership in 1992. Partition--or a two-state solution--remained the goal of all Rabin's successors: Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, and most notably Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert (though not Benjamin Netanyahu), and also of the bulk of the Israeli public. But Mearsheimer and Walt do not venture into this significant field.

The Palestinian story was different. The Palestinian national movement, from its inception up to 2000, from Haj Amin al Husseini to Yasser Arafat, backed by the Arab world, rejected a two-state solution. There was no great debate. The Palestinian leadership rejected the 1937 and 1947 partition plans (and the Begin-Sadat "autonomy plan" of 1978, which would have led to a two-state solution), and insisted that the Jews had no right to even an inch of Palestine. And the Palestinian government of today, led by the popularly elected Hamas, continues to espouse this uncompromising, anti-partitionist one-state position. All of this is completely ignored in Mearsheimer and Walt's "history."

V.

And now to the issue of transfer and expulsion. It is true, as Mearsheimer and Walt observe, quoting me, that "the idea of transfer is as old as modern Zionism and has accompanied its evolution and praxis during the past century." But once again the matter is complicated, and the problem of who said and did what, and where, and when, and why, is all-important. This complexity has proved too great for Mearsheimer and Walt to handle.

Zionist leaders, from Herzl through Ben-Gurion and Weizmann, between 1881 and the mid-1940s, occasionally expressed support for the "transfer" of Arabs, or of "the Arabs," out of the territory of the future Jewish state. But three salient facts must be recalled.

First, the Zionist leadership throughout never adopted the idea as part of the movement's political platform; nor did it ever figure in the platforms of any of the major Zionist parties. Second, the Zionist leaders generally said, and believed, that a Jewish majority would be achieved in Palestine, or in whatever part of it became a Jewish state, by means of massive Jewish immigration, and that this immigration would also materially benefit the Arab population (which it generally did during the Mandate). Third, the awful idea of transfer was resurrected and pressed by Zionist leaders at particular historical junctures, at moments of acute crisis, in response to Arab waves of violence that seemed to vitiate the possibility of Arab-Jewish co-existence in a single state, and in response to waves of European anti-Semitic violence that, from the Zionist viewpoint, necessitated the achievement of a safe haven for Europe's oppressed and threatened Jews. Such a haven required space in which to settle the Jewish masses and an environment free of murderous Arabs: this, indeed, was the logic behind the Peel Commission's transfer recommendation.

Moreover, during the 1930s and 1940s, the espoused policy of the leader of the Palestinian Arab national movement, the Muslim cleric Haj Amin al Husseini, was frankly expulsionist about the Yishuv. He repeatedly stated that he was willing, in his future Palestinian state, to accommodate as citizens only those Jews who had been residents or citizens of Palestine up to 1917--say, 60,000 to 80,000 in all. When asked in 1937 by the Peel Commission what he intended to do with the 80 percent of the Jews who had been born in or come to Palestine after that date, he responded that time will tell. The commissioners understood him to mean that they were destined for expulsion or worse.

In other words, the surge in thinking about transfer in the late 1930s among mainstream Zionist leaders was in part a response to the expulsionist mentality of the Palestinians, which was reinforced by ongoing Arab violence and terrorism. The violence resulted in Britain's severely curtailing immigration to Palestine, thus assuring that many Jews who otherwise might have been saved were left stranded in Europe (and consigned to death), while at the same time foreclosing the traditional Zionist option and aim of achieving a Jewish majority in Palestine through immigration. Mearsheimer and Walt rightly take to task the anti-Arab terrorism of the Irgun in those years; but they omit to mention that the Irgun unleashed its bloody operations in response to Arab terrorism, and that in any case it represented only the fringe right wing of the Zionist movement, of which the mainstream--unlike the Palestinian Arab national movement--consistently rejected and condemned terrorism.

During the early 1940s, against the backdrop of the Holocaust and official British deliberations about a postwar solution to the Palestine problem based on partition, all understood (as had the Peel Commission) that any partition not accompanied by a transfer of Arabs out of the territory of the Jewish-state-to-be would be unstable or pointless, as the large Arab minority, if left in place, would be disloyal and rebellious, and would inevitably enjoy the support of the surrounding Arab world. Such a settlement would solve nothing. British officials and Arab heads of state (who, of course, feared to state these views in public) shared this view. That is why the British Labour Party

Executive in 1944 supported partition accompanied by transfer, and that is why Jordan's Emir Abdullah and Iraq's prime minister Nuri Said, among other Arab statesmen, supported such a population transfer if Palestine was to be partitioned.

And, indeed, in 1947-1948 the Palestinian Arabs, supported by the surrounding Arab world, rebelled against the U.N. partition resolution and unleashed a bloody civil war, which was followed by a pan-Arab invasion. The war resulted in a large, partial transfer of population. The chaos that all had foreseen if Palestine were partitioned without an orderly population transfer in fact enveloped the country. But this is emphatically not to say, as Mearsheimer and Walt do, that the Zionists' occasional ruminations about transfer were translated in 1947-1948 into a overall plan and policy--unleashed, as they put it, when the "opportunity came," as if what occurred in 1948 was a general and premeditated expulsion.

The Zionist leadership accepted the partition plan, which provided for a Jewish state in 55 percent of Palestine with 550,000 Jews and between 400,000 and 500,000 Arabs. The Jewish Agency called on the Arabs to desist from violence, and promised a life of beneficial co-existence. In private, Zionist officials began planning agricultural and regional development that took into account the large Arab minority and its continued citizenship in the new Jewish state. Indeed, down to the end of March 1948, after four months of the Palestinian Arab assault on the Yishuv, backed by the Arab League, Zionist policy was geared to the establishment of a Jewish state with a large Arab minority. Haganah policy throughout these months was to remain on the defensive, to avoid hitting civilians, and generally to refrain from spreading the conflagration to parts of Palestine still untouched by warfare. Indeed, on March 24, 1948, Yisrael Galili, the head of the Haganah National Command, the political leadership of the organization, issued a secret blanket directive to all brigades and units to abide by long-standing official Zionist policy toward the Arab communities in the territory of the emergent Jewish state--to secure "the full rights, needs, and freedom of the Arabs in the Hebrew state without discrimination" and to strive for "co-existence with freedom and respect," as he put it. And this was not a document devised for Western or U.N. eyes, with a propagandistic purpose; it was a secret, blanket, internal operational directive, in Hebrew.

It was only at the start of April, with its back to the wall (much of the Yishuv, in particular Jewish Jerusalem, was being strangled by Arab ambushes along the roads) and facing the prospect of pan-Arab invasion six weeks hence, that the Haganah changed its strategy and went over to the offensive, and began uprooting Palestinian communities, unsystematically and without a general policy. Needless to say, the invasion by the combined armies of the Arab states on May 15 only hardened Yishuv hearts toward the Palestinians who had summoned the invaders, whose declared purpose--as Azzam Pasha, the secretary-general of the Arab League, put it--was to re-enact a Mongol-like massacre, or, as others said, to drive the Jews into the sea. And yet Israel never adopted a general policy of expulsion (or incarceration--as did the United States in its internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, without being under direct existential threat), which accounts for the fact that 160,000 Arabs remained in Israel and became citizens in 1949. They accounted for more than 15 percent of the country's population.

From Mearsheimer and Walt, you would never suspect that the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem in 1948 occurred against the backdrop, and as the result, of a war--a war that for the Jews was a matter of survival, and which those same Palestinians and their Arab brothers had launched. To omit this historical background is bad history--and stark dishonesty. It is quite true, and quite understandable, that the Israeli government during the war decided to bar a return of the refugees to their homes--to bar the return of those who, before becoming refugees, had attempted to destroy the Jewish state and whose continued loyalty to the Jewish state, if they were readmitted, would have been more than questionable. There was nothing "innocent," as Mearsheimer and Walt put it, about the Palestinians and their behavior before their eviction-evacuation in 1947-1948 (as there was nothing innocent about Haj Amin al Husseini's work for the Nazis in Berlin from 1941 to 1945, broadcasting anti-Allied propaganda and recruiting Muslim troops for the Wehrmacht). And what befell the Palestinians was not "a moral crime," whatever that might mean; it was something the Palestinians brought down upon themselves, with their own decisions and actions, their own historical agency. But they like to deny their historical agency, and many "sympathetic" outsiders like to abet them in this illusion, which is significantly responsible for their continued statelessness.

VI.

One last historical point, about contemporary history. Mearsheimer and Walt recycle the canard that Israel and the United States offered the Palestinians nothing of worth, nothing that they should have accepted, in the negotiations in 2000. They write that Barak's peace proposals at Camp David offered the Palestinians "a disarmed and dismembered set of 'Bantustans' under *de facto* Israeli control." But according to the most reliable witnesses and participants in the talks--and the Palestinian side, for good reason, has never produced a detailed description of the negotiations at Camp David, a day-by-day account of who offered what and when--by the end of the Camp David negotiation in the summer of 2000 Barak had offered the Palestinians a state comprising 90 to 91 percent of the West Bank, 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, and functional control of parts of East Jerusalem. A bridge or tunnel would have connected the West Bank and Gaza. Was this really not a reasonable basis for Palestinian sovereignty? But Arafat said no and walked out, and the Palestinians launched the second intifada.

And unlike what readers might infer from Mearsheimer and Walt, this was not the end of that year's diplomatic process. In December, President Clinton--with Barak's approval--improved the deal, offering the Palestinians 94 to 96 percent of the West Bank (with territorial compensation elsewhere for the 4 to 6 percent lost), 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, sovereignty over East Jerusalem including at least half of the Old City, sovereignty over the surface of the disputed Temple Mount, and massive help to rehabilitate the refugees. Again the Palestinians said no, and continued shooting. The Israeli Cabinet, with a heavy heart, endorsed the Clinton parameters. The Americans and the Israelis, contrary to Mearsheimer and Walt, most certainly offered the Palestinians "a viable state of their own." It was precisely such a state that the Palestinians, in their stupidity, turned down.

Accurate descriptions and maps of the Israeli offer in July and the Israeli-endorsed Clinton parameters of December--as well as the Palestinians' spurious map of what was offered them--may be found in Dennis Ross's *The Missing Peace*. Ross was the chief American Middle East negotiator. (Mearsheimer and Walt rely on a map contained in *The New Intifada*, edited by Roane Carey; but Ross, unlike Carey, was party to and knew in great detail what went on, and was privy to all the documentation.) In his autobiography, Clinton backs to the hilt Ross's version of what was said and offered (as does Shlomo Ben-Ami, who was the Israeli foreign minister at the time, in his recent book *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy*, which elsewhere is highly critical of Israel). All three state clearly that Arafat said no. Mearsheimer and Walt, amateur students of the subject with a political ax to grind, transform this no into a yes.

I say amateur students because there are outrageously incorrect historical assertions in Mearsheimer and Walt's work, often buried in the footnotes. For instance, footnote 10 states: "It is also worth noting that the British favored the Zionists over the Palestinians during the period of the British Mandate (1919-1948)." But during the Mandate, both Arabs and Jews were "Palestinians"; and the Mandate began de facto in 1917-1918, when the British conquered Palestine, in two stages, from the Turks; or in 1920, when the civilian administration was installed and the San Remo conference endorsed the Mandate ("1919" is in any case a meaningless date in this regard). And most importantly, the British government clearly "favored" Zionism in the years between 1917 and 1936 (though many of its officers and officials in Palestine, including some of the high commissioners, did not); but it certainly did not in the years between 1938 and 1948. In 1939, Whitehall published a White Paper that portended and backed the establishment in Palestine of an Arab-majority state (Husseini rejected that, too); and in 1947 the British abstained when the U.N. General Assembly authorized partition and Jewish statehood; and in 1947-1948 the British provided the Egyptian and Iraqi armies with arms and advice, and in 1948 they provided money, arms, and leadership to the Jordanian Army, the Arab Legion, as it battled the Jewish state under the command of a British officer, John Glubb. The British can hardly be described in 1939-1948 as pro-Zionist, though Ben-Gurion's traditional depiction of them in 1948 as orchestrating the pan-Arab assault on Israel was also wide of the mark.

Consider some other examples. On page 6, Mearsheimer and Walt assert that Jonathan Pollard, a Jewish-American naval intelligence analyst in the 1980s, provided Israel with classified American material, "which Israel reportedly passed onto the Soviet Union to gain more exit visas for Soviet Jewry." To the best of my knowledge, this is a lie. On page 9, Mearsheimer and Walt write that "citizenship [of Israel] is based on the principle of blood kinship." This is an outrageous assertion, with the worst possible echoes. The truth is that since the state's inception, 15 to 20 percent of Israel's citizens have been Muslim and Christian Arabs. In 1948-1949, citizenship was granted to all persons living in the country, regardless of race or religion, and it is granted by law after five years of residency and the satisfaction of various qualifications (as in all western democracies) to applicants today regardless of race or religion--though it is true that Jewish immigrants can and do receive citizenship upon arrival in Israel, and it is also true that Israel is a Jewish state, as France is (and, I hope, will remain) a French state and Britain is a British

state. On page 12, Mearsheimer and Walt write, referring to my book *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956*, that Israel's retaliatory strikes in the early 1950s "were actually part of a broader effort to expand Israel's borders." This is incorrect--and had they used my book honestly, they could not have reached such a conclusion. On page 10, they observe that "The Arabs ... had been in continuous possession of [Palestine] for 1300 years," which is incorrect, and that there were "only about 15,000 Jews in Palestine" in 1882, which is also incorrect. (Typically, Mearsheimer and Walt cite as their authority Justin McCarthy's *The Population of Palestine*, without noting that he also assumed the existence of additional thousands of Jews in Palestine who were not Ottoman citizens.) And so on.

In their introduction, Mearsheimer and Walt tell their readers that "the facts recounted here are not in serious dispute among scholars.... The evidence on which they rest is not controversial." This is ludicrous. I would offer their readers a contrary proposition: that the "facts" presented by Mearsheimer and Walt suggest a fundamental ignorance of the history with which they deal, and that the "evidence" they deploy is so tendentious as to be evidence only of an acute bias. *That* is what will be not in serious dispute among scholars.

[BENNY MORRIS](#) , a professor Middle East history at Ben-Gurion University, is the author, most recently, of *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge University Press).