

## *Reviews*

### *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*

Edited by Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen

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What makes a certain diplomatic activity “clandestine”? Most of the diplomatic activities of any state are not made known to the public, even in the age of WikiLeaks, Facebook, Twitter, and aggressive journalism. Diplomacy is much in evidence in negotiating international trade agreements and yet it remains more secret than, for example, the negotiations between Israel and Syria (1991–2000), the subject of the last chapter, by Ahron Bregman, of *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*. This book, edited by Clive Jones, Professor of Middle East Studies and International Politics at the University of Leeds, and Tore T. Petersen, Professor of International and Diplomatic History at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, is devoted to the covert aspect of Israel's conduct of its international affairs. The book is made up of thirteen chapters, some of which were written by well-known Israeli scholars such as Uri Bialer, Zach Levey, and Yigal Sheffy.

In Chapter 5, “Back-Door Diplomacy: The Mistress Syndrome in Israel's Relations with Turkey, 1957–60,” Noa Schonmann, lecturer in the Politics and International Relations of the Middle East at Oxford, suggests that those engaged in backdoor diplomacy assume that substance is more important than form. Unfortunately, in Israel's case, backdoor diplomacy has been used even when there was no evidence that it was more effective than the usual channels or that substance overrode form. The inclination of Israeli prime ministers to use every possible channel of communication with Arab governments and leaders except the Israeli Foreign Ministry has undermined the process of normalization between Israel and the Arab states with which it does have diplomatic relations. In diplomacy, form is often substance, and established pattern of carelessness with regard to form are hard to eliminate.

Interestingly, Schonmann's article deals with the period in Israel's ties with Turkey when Israel sought full diplomatic relations (1957–60). At the time of this writing, Israel and Turkey are engaged in an attempt to re-launch their formal relations and return their ambassadors to their respective posts. Following the May 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident, Ankara decided to freeze relations. Once again, Turkey dangles in front of us the “form”—i.e., the return of the ambassadors—if

its demands are met. But if an Israeli ambassador presents his or her credentials to a Turkish head of state, there is no guarantee that he or she will be used to convey secret messages from the Israeli government. In fact, it is more likely that other channels would be used. This is the crux of the discussion on the clandestine aspects of Israel's foreign policy and the channels used in the application of that policy. This, of course, has to do with the built-in tension in any parliamentary system of government between the head of the executive branch and the person who is directly responsible for running the foreign policy apparatus.

In Israel's case, this tension was exacerbated by the fact that David Ben-Gurion overshadowed and even dwarfed the newly-established state's first foreign minister, Moshe Sharett. It could be said that the combination of the disparity in their personal stature and the fact that the prime minister also had ministerial responsibility for the Mossad dealt the Israeli Foreign Ministry a blow from which it has never fully recovered.

Asaf Siniver, Senior Lecturer in International Security at the University of Birmingham, suggests in Chapter 7, "The Limits of Public Diplomacy: Abba Eban and the June 1967 War," that Foreign Minister Abba Eban lost power to the Ministry of Defense. In fact, Eban fell victim to a well-established pattern of limiting the influence of the Foreign Ministry. He was simply too weak and too far removed from the ruling elite, which at that time were nearly all of East European origin and drawn from the Israeli center-left bloc, which retained political power until 1977. Even Golda Meir, who succeeded Sharett as foreign minister, could not stand up to the younger Shimon Peres and Moshe Dayan, who were especially close to Ben-Gurion and were the central figures on key defense and foreign affairs issues.

Next year, Germany and Israel will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations. The relations between the two countries developed in the wake of long negotiations over reparations for Nazi crimes during World War II. Later, in the mid-1950s, they focused on military and intelligence cooperation. BESA Center researcher Shlomo Shpiro, author of Chapter 10, entitled "Shadowy Interests: West German-Israel Intelligence and Military Cooperation, 1957–82," fails to mention the important role played by Peres and Asher Ben Natan on the Israeli side, and Franz Josef Strauss on the German one. As foreign minister, Gold Meir fumed when she discovered the activities being conducted in Germany behind her back, but she could do nothing to stop them or to have responsibility for them shifted to her own ministry.

When Peres became foreign minister in 1992, he did not, as Siniver suggests, initiate the process of rehabilitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Madrid

conference at the end of 1991 occurred when the Likud, under Yitzhak Shamir, was in power. The conference opened many hitherto-closed doors for Israel, most notably to India and China, and there was no competition at that time from other government agencies. When, in the summer of 1992, Yitzhak Rabin came to power, he and Peres fully exploited the impact of the Oslo Accords to bring about a dramatic expansion in the scope of Israel's diplomacy. For several years, that boosted the standing of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

While this book certainly sheds light on some interesting chapters in Israel's diplomatic history, some of its articles do not really belong in this collection, such as those dealing with negotiations with Arab neighbors. Other important aspects, such as the diplomacy involved in establishing relations with key Asian states, are not covered at all.

Finally, as someone whose professor once admonished him for having made too many typographical errors in a work he submitted, I should perhaps be especially forgiving of the editors of this book for making similar mistakes. Still, four spelling errors in the names of Israelis in six consecutive footnotes of Chapter One suggest sloppy editing. What I cannot forgive, however, is that while my own name actually made it into the book—for which I am grateful to Prof. Rory Miller—it was omitted from the index. Presumably I am not the only Israeli diplomat subjected to such an “indignity.”

