

BOOK REVIEW

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Israel The Will to Prevail

Danny Danon

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‘Nobody does Israel any service by proclaiming its “right to exist.”... There is certainly no other state, big or small, young or old, that would consider the mere recognition of its “right to exist” a favour, or a negotiable concession, observed veteran Israeli diplomat Abba Eban (p. 146).

If the will is strong, one can prevail against all odds. The author, and Member of Knesset (MK), Danny Danon is a Zionist by his political ideology. In his own words, 'Israel has no choice but to act assertively when necessary, even if it means doing so on its own.' This is his first book, written in the hope that it would urge young Jews to stand up and join the struggle for Israel. Naturally, the book deals with several sensitive issues facing the nation, and the author's own understanding of them. He has had many differences of opinion over time with his own Likud party leadership on various pertinent issues like the peace process, withdrawal from the territories occupied by Israel (after the June War of 1967), and the future of the Israeli state. His book contributes significantly in areas of such debates within Israel. He fervently holds on to his view that the time for a 'Land for Peace' deal with Israel's neighbours is over.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part looks into the dangers and opportunities that Israel is presented with in the face of the Arab Spring. The second part analyses Israel's past, in trying to understand the present. Finally, the author gives his own view for 'a road map for Jewish victory,' in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the regional conflict.

The author has dealt with every state in the Middle East vis-à-vis the Arab Spring. The attempt in itself is not new. There is enough literature in circulation, both in the academia and media, dealing with the same. It is the treatment of the subject that makes this work interesting. The author does not take a historical view of Iran, Egypt, or Saudi Arabia in discussing the Arab Spring. Rather, the approach is to understand Israel's relation with those states before and during the uprisings; and the possible opportunities (advantages, at times) that Israel may benefit out of the new situation. His is not a moral approach but a pragmatic one. The underlying argument is that Israel should take unilateral policy decisions to further its ambitions, territorial and otherwise. The book discusses a plethora of issues ranging from rising anti-Semitism to the Iranian nuclear question. Well-researched evidences are utilized to support the author's argument, but often end up raising more questions than providing answers.

The US-Israeli relation is undoubtedly of vital importance for both. Any book dealing with the foreign policy of Israel cannot neglect this fact. To the author, the close relationship between the two countries stems from three important elements: complementary religious beliefs, shared values and basic mutual strategic security needs. He briefly discusses the various peace processes that were mostly engineered under the US auspices, and the repeated failure of each one to achieve any of its targets. The impression projected in the book regarding the peace process is one of deep disillusionment. Danon refers to the peace process as being a standstill process. E argues "Albert Einstein... once defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." This, according to Danon, is Israel and its peace processes.' (p. 143)

It is a commonly held belief that the Israeli strength and might in the region are directly related to the US goodwill and the natural assumption is that Israel is dependent on the US and its support in various aspects like settlement policies, etcetera. The author argues the opposite.

Historically, the US had not always favoured Israel. It was only after the June 1967 War that the close nexus between the two countries have developed. The book argues for the Israeli predominance where the bilateral relationship is concerned and according to Danon, it is the US that needs Israel (a fellow democracy) in the region for its own interest, not vice-versa.

Coming to the settlement policies of Israel, it has to be remembered that the author supports the rightwing reading of the Zionist ideology, drawing on the biblical-historical relation of the Jews to the land. Disillusioned with the present peace process, and being a firm believer in the land of Zion, he envisages a three-state solution for addressing the refugee issue. This three-state solution is basically to be a regional agreement between Jordan, Egypt and Israel to absorb and naturalize the refugees of the 1948 War. The author refers to the Palestinians as a geographical not national identity. The book attributes the origins of the Palestinian nationalism as an outcome and result of the creation of Israel. It should be mentioned here that Danny Danon has been a vocal opponent of the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and West Bank (he uses the term 'Judea and Samaria'), and prefers to include regional partners against the traditional "two state/one state" dialogue. His views have often been in direct opposition to Likud, his own party, and its leadership.

The book itself falls short of providing answers to many issues. An outright dismissal of the Palestinian issue and a disregard for international legal structures when it suits Israel's purposes is not practically tenable. Even though the book is rich in sources, the arguments are highly biased and hence lopsided. Still, as the author mentions in the preface itself, this is his view aimed at inspiring the youth for the Jewish struggle. Bias in views is perhaps an expected factor. To the merit of the book, it contributes and enriches the already existing debates on issues like Zionism, Judaism and democracy in Israel.

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