

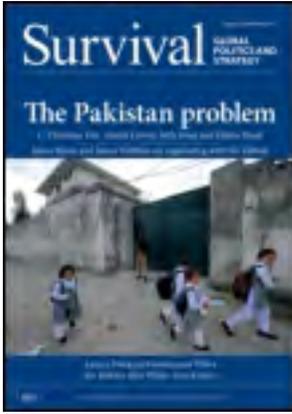
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Letters to the editor

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Letters to the Editor

The 'New' Israeli Historians?

In response

In *Fabricating Israeli History: The 'New Historians'* (Frank Cass, 1997) I took issue with

the excessive partisanship that has plagued the study of Israeli history, and I pointed out the many errors and distortions found in the work of the so-called 'New Historians'. To judge by Lustick's hysterical reaction ('Israeli History: Who is Fabricating What?', *Survival*, Autumn 1997, pp. 156–66), my book has touched a raw nerve indeed. Had his review been published in a specialised Middle Eastern journal, I would not have taken the trouble to respond. Quite the reverse, coming as it does from a well-known critic of Israel, Lustick's invective provides the ultimate proof that I got my book right; I would have been greatly alarmed had it left Lustick unmoved. However, since *Survival's* readership may not be so familiar with the excessive partisanship of Middle Eastern studies, or for that matter with Lustick's large axe to grind, I feel obliged to set the record straight.

Since Lustick fails to refute a single factual assertion made in my book but rather engages in wholesale vilification, coupled with heaps of praise for his fellow 'new historians', I see no point in rebutting each of his malevolent distortions, misrepresentations and misquotations. But consider, for example, that Lustick charges me of regularly presenting quotations which say 'the very opposite' of what I tell my readers they say (p. 163), yet brings not a single example to prove this patently false claim. He accuses me of 'attacking [Avi] Shlaim for going back to primary sources instead of relying on

available secondary-source accounts' (p. 163) when I actually said precisely the opposite, namely that Shlaim both prefers old, second-hand partisan evidence to newly released official documents and withholds critical primary source material from his readers. Lustick also charges me of insinuating that the Palestinians 'did not deserve what they did not get [in 1948]' and that they fled largely in response to calls by their leadership (p. 165). But I never made any such assertions; rather, I showed that the collapse of the Palestinian community in the 1948 war was in no small measure due to its lack of national cohesiveness and to its desertion by its political élites before the going got tough. Similarly, contrary to Lustick's (mis)claim (p. 164), I did not censure Morris for failing to use Arab source material (others correctly do so); *ipso facto* I could not have failed to suggest how the non-use of these documents affected Morris's work. Instead I demonstrated the systematic falsification of archival source material by Morris in an attempt to rewrite Israeli history in an image of his own devising.

Through careful examination of the documentation used by the 'new historians', as well as a wealth of sources that they have either deliberately withheld from their readers or failed to trace, *Fabricating Israeli History* proves that they are neither new nor true historians but partisans seeking to provide academic respectability to long-standing misconceptions and prejudices on the Arab–Israeli conflict. They are scarcely 'new' since most of their 'factual discoveries' and interpretations have been articulated long before; and they are anything but true historians because, taking in vain the name of the archives, they violate all tenets of *bona fide* research in their endeavour to invent

an Israeli history in an image of their own devising. This has ranged from the more 'innocent' act of reading into documents what is not there, to tendentious truncation of documents in a way that distorts their original meaning, to 'creative rewriting' of original texts by putting words in people's mouths and/or giving inaccurate descriptions of the contents of these documents.

Space allows just one glimpse into the dynamics of this partisanship. In his study on the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem, Israeli academic Benny Morris claimed that the 'transfer solution' – the expulsion of the Palestinians to the neighbouring Arab states, had 'a basis in mainstream Jewish thinking, if not actual planning, from the late 1930s and 1940s' (Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 24). But Morris, who has made the greatest effort among the 'new historians' to prove this thesis, not only devotes a mere five pages to one of the thorniest issues in Israeli–Palestinian relations, but he repeatedly distorts the evidence on which he claims to rely.

Thus, for example, on 5 October 1937 David Ben-Gurion wrote to his son: 'We do not wish and do not need to expel Arabs and take their place'. In the original English-language version of his book, Morris misrepresented this sentence as saying: 'We must expel Arabs and take their places' (Morris, *ibid.*, p. 25). However, in the Hebrew translation of his book and a recent Hebrew article, Morris reverted to Ben-Gurion's correct words (Morris, 'A New Look on Central Zionist Documents', *Alpayim*, no. 13, 1996). Was this because the Israeli audience can check for itself the veracity of the original Hebrew letter?

Similarly, Morris claims to find a hint of the transfer idea in a later speech by Ben-Gurion summarised thus: 'Ben-Gurion starkly outlined the emergent Jewish State's main problem – its prospective population of 520,000 Jews and 350,000 Arabs. Including Jerusalem, the state

would have a population of about one million, 40% of which would be non-Jews. "This fact must be viewed in all its clarity and sharpness. With such a [population] composition, there cannot even be complete certainty that the government will be held by a Jewish majority ... There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60%". The Yishuv's situation and fate, he went on, compelled the adoption of "a new approach ... [new] habits of mind" to "suit our new future. We must think like a state"' (*ibid.*, p. 28).

Morris leaves the impression here that Ben-Gurion advocated population transfer to solve the new state's demographic problems. What he withholds from his readers is that Ben-Gurion added: 'From here stems the first and principal conclusion ... In order to ensure not only the establishment of the Jewish State but its existence and destiny as well – we must bring a million-and-a-half Jews to the country and root them there. It is only when there will be at least two million Jews in the country – that the state will be truly established' (David Ben-Gurion, *Bama'araha*, Labour Party Publications, 1959, pp. 258–59). In other words, not the expulsion of the Arabs but rather mass Jewish immigration was Ben-Gurion's solution. As for the position of the Arabs in the Jewish state, Ben-Gurion could not be clearer: 'We must think in terms of a state, in terms of independence, in terms of full responsibility for ourselves – and for others. In our state there will be non-Jews as well – and all of them will be equal citizens; equal in everything without any exception; that is: the state will be their state as well ... The attitude of the Jewish State to its Arab citizens will be an important factor – though not the only one – in building good neighbourly relations with the Arab states. If the Arab citizen will feel at home in our state, and if his status will not be in the least different from that of the Jew, and perhaps better than the status of the Arab in an Arab state, and if the state will help him in a truthful and dedicated way to

reach the economic, social, and cultural level of the Jewish community, then Arab distrust will accordingly subside and a bridge to a Semitic, Jewish–Arab alliance, will be built' (*ibid.*, pp. 260, 265, 266).

This is how Ben-Gurion envisaged Jewish–Arab relations in the prospective Jewish state and in the wider Middle East. Not 'transfer' of the Arab population from the Jewish state but a true partnership among equal citizens; not 'fortress Israel', a besieged European island in an ocean of Arab hostility, but a Jewish–Arab Semitic alliance. One can easily see where Shimon Peres, Ben-Gurion's foremost self-professed disciple, has drawn his ideas of a 'New Middle East'. Why Morris, Lustick, and their like-minded 'revisionists' have chosen to truncate, twist and distort Ben-Gurion's real vision of Jewish–Arab relations is for them to say.

That these self-styled 'new historians' have managed to pass this off as history is bad enough. However, taking the moral high ground they audaciously present their politically motivated partisanship as 'the only basis for a true peace in the Middle East' (Lustick, p. 166).

I beg to differ. As I have already argued elsewhere ('Rewriting Israel's History', *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1996), the Palestinian claim to national self-determination is as good as any, and needs no buttressing from mobilised historical fabrication. Securing the future means coming to terms with one's past, however painful that might be – not distorting or denying it.

Efraim Karsh

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Ian S. Lustick responds:

Efraim Karsh repeatedly refers to me as a 'new historian'. I am not. My field is political science, and although I often use historical materials, I am not, have never before been characterised as, and have never characterised myself as, a historian

– let alone a 'new historian'. What is puzzling is that I know that Karsh knows this. I am explicitly identified as a political scientist in the 'notes on contributors' section of *Israel at the Crossroads* (Frank Cass, 1993), a volume he co-edited and which originated from papers presented by me and other scholars at an Association for Israel Studies conference which he hosted at King's College London in January 1993.

But this mistake in my identification, required by Karsh's attempt to include me as one of the 'self-styled "new historians"' he ridicules, is not really so puzzling when considered against one of the main arguments I make in my review. As I warned readers, much of the Karsh book is based on a brazen misuse of evidence and an apparent disregard for the ability of readers to penetrate complex formulations to determine who is distorting what. Karsh challenges me to back up my assertion that in his book he made a practice of presenting quotations which say 'the very opposite' of what he tells his readers they say. He accuses me of bringing 'not a single example to prove this patently false claim', even though in my review I list six specific pages in his text where he does just what I say he does.

Since Karsh relies heavily on the complexity of the issues involved in order to elicit the deference of his readers to his conclusions, it is particularly unfortunate that space does not allow a detailed examination of the instances I cite. One will have to do. As I pointed out in my review, one of Karsh's strangest arguments is that there never was any agreement, tacit or explicit, between Transjordan's Emir Abdullah and the Zionist leadership about how to minimise clashes or foster mutual interests. As an important piece of evidence, he reproduces Golda Meir's account of a meeting she had with Abdullah in November 1947, despite the fact that in the very passage he cites, Meir herself explicitly acknowledges that there *was* an agreement: 'The meeting was conducted', wrote Meir, 'on the basis that there was an

arrangement and an understanding as to what both of us wanted and that our interests did not collide. For our part we told him then that we could not promise to help his incursion into the country [i. e. Mandatory Palestine], since we would be obliged to observe the UN Resolution which, as we have already reckoned at the time, would provide for the establishment of the two states in Palestine. We could not therefore – so we said – give *active* [emphasis added] support to the violation of this resolution. If he was prepared and willing to confront the world and us with a *fait accompli* – the tradition of friendship between us would continue and we would certainly find a common language on settling those matters that were of interest to both parties' (Karsh, pp. 93–94).

Aside from Meir's explicit reference to 'an arrangement and an understanding', notice the word 'active'. Anyone familiar in the least with the historical circumstances, not to say the agreement some years later between Ben-Gurion and the British and French to collaborate in an invasion of Egypt by pretending that the European intervention was to protect the Suez Canal from the Israelis, can appreciate how strongly this passage points to a 'plausibly deniable' agreement between the nascent Jewish state and Transjordan that would allow Abdullah to take control over much of the West Bank in return for a 'non-aggression' pact between him and the Zionists. Yet Karsh tells his readers that this passage makes it 'clearly evident' that there was no attempt to divide Palestine between the Zionists and Abdullah (Karsh, p. 95).

Most of Karsh's letter is a repetition of attacks made against Benny Morris. I will not repeat myself in regard to Karsh's treatment of Morris' work. I will point out, however, that Karsh's accusation that Morris 'misrepresented' a sentence from Ben-Gurion's diary is itself an unfortunately typical Karsh misrepresentation.

Several issues of the Hebrew journal *Alpayim* were devoted to this episode. It turns out that the reason Morris was

forced to use Shabtai Teveth's work, *Ben Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (Oxford, 1985), for which he is taken to task by Karsh, is that the actual diaries had been made available to Teveth (a quasi-'official' biographer of Ben-Gurion), but not to other researchers. Teveth quoted the line regarding the need to 'expel' the Arabs, which appears in the text of the diaries, but which had been partially erased (by whom is not clear). The Hebrew version of Morris' book appeared after the diaries were made available to other researchers, explaining the change in his formulation.

Karsh expresses solicitude for readers of *Survival* who 'may not be so familiar with the excessive partisanship of Middle Eastern studies'. I will not deny that such partisanship exists and that scholarship and polemics are often difficult to distinguish. But not in this case. Karsh may attack the 'revisionist' historians and pose, at some points in his book, as a defender of established truth against a few rogue professors, but among Middle East specialists, including virtually all the Israeli scholars Karsh reports himself as admiring, it is Karsh who occupies a lonely and querulous extreme.

Correction

The reference to 'Aneurin Bevin' in Ian S. Lustick's Autumn 1997 review essay should have read 'Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin'. This error was introduced during the editing process and is entirely the fault of the journal, not the author.

Europe's Role in NATO

To the Editor:

Michael O'Hanlon's article, 'Transforming NATO: The Role of European Forces' (*Survival*, Autumn 1997, pp. 5–15), raises many interesting points and is rightly critical of some aspects of the European approach to security issues. The article was apparently written before the European Union's July 1997 Amsterdam summit, but the events there did nothing to alter his observation that 'With multiple decision-making centres

and no immediate prospect of realising a true "European Security and Defence Identity", NATO Europe will not be able to use its defence budget as efficiently as the US' (p. 6). However, in calling on Europe to spend more on defence he is avoiding reality. With many countries under pressure to meet the criteria for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), yet unwilling to cut social expenditures, money for defence will be very limited. Nevertheless, it is not all bad news. It is precisely because Paris was embarrassed by its contribution to the 1991 Gulf War effort that it decided to abolish conscript defence forces. Early next century, that decision will enable France to contribute larger and more effective fighting forces – thereby enhancing European capability. Furthermore, the Western European Union (WEU) is actively addressing the problem of strategic airlift, not least by its June 1997 agreement with Ukraine.

O'Hanlon calls for a 'greater sense of burden-sharing and risk-sharing'. Some Americans also refer to 'responsibility-sharing' – a more flattering and more realistic description, implying political as well as military contributions. Even for the US, the days of unilateral action seem to be past. All the indications are that for any intervention the US will seek the legitimacy of a UN Security Council resolution and the presence of allies, as it did for the 1991 operation in Haiti, even though the US had the capability to undertake that operation alone.

On defence industries, I do not support the author's argument for minimising the significance of the trade gap in transatlantic sales, accentuated as it is by the protection of US interests when necessary by classifying projects as 'black'. However, Europe undoubtedly compounds the problem by failing to resolve quickly the issue of merging companies that could counter the US defence giants. The news of the French government's tardy decision to disallow Thomson-CSF from being taken over in mid-October 1997 by any other company than France's own Alcatel-Alsthom, favouring national

interest over European partners, damages the potential for progress. The situation only accentuates the frustration felt by the British and German companies which perceive the need to push ahead as rapidly as possible. However, were Europe to develop more competitive defence industries and tailor its forces in the manner suggested, I doubt if the US would even then be willing to give up the NATO command of Southern Europe as the author suggests.

Where I do take serious issue with O'Hanlon is in his theme of Americans dying in disproportionate numbers 'in a future conflict in defence of shared interests' (p. 6). This is gratuitous and badly thought out. If anything, the situation could well be the other way around. It is all very well to call for military action without having any soldiers at risk on the ground – as the US did in the early days of the intervention in former Yugoslavia – but this does not tally well with a US attitude that is sometimes less robust than it ought to be in contributing to the Stabilisation Force. Behind this approach lies a US determination to avoid casualties at all costs. With their experience in Somalia in mind, the Americans may not have taken the levels of casualties experienced by the French and British in the period before Dayton, because they would have withdrawn earlier. As the US continues to rely increasingly on advanced technology, Europeans may well be more vulnerable than Americans to casualties. US forces may be able to participate, but will be remote from danger.

US commentators should appreciate a general European concern that, driven by the fear of taking casualties, the US will only use overwhelming force when other approaches might be more fruitful. In any case, the US resolve and commitment to any enterprise because of this fear might well not be all one might want from a superpower ally.

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South Korea's Defence Industry

To the Editor:

Susan Willett ('East Asia's Changing Defence Industry', *Survival*, Autumn 1997, pp. 107–34) concludes that the South Korean defence industry has 'adapted to change' with 'remarkable speed', suggesting that it will be among the winners as the international arms market contracts, '[challenging] the status of established international powers in the so-called "hierarchy of supply"' (p. 128). In reality, however, the outlook is much less rosy.

In fact, South Korea's defence industry is heading in the wrong direction, aping Japan's inefficient Cold War approach in a radically different market with insufficient resources to create an innovative, self-sustaining technology base. As discussed in the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook 1997*, South Korean investment in military research and development (R&D) is accelerating when every other major arms producer in the world except Japan's is declining. Seoul's investment in military R&D increased by almost a factor of six from 1987–97 to about \$700 million (in constant 1996 dollars) and is expected to increase by another factor of 2–5 over the next decade. In comparison, Tokyo's military R&D budget increased steadily by just over a factor of two from 1986–96 to about \$1.3 billion. Among non-nuclear-weapon states, only Germany spends more on military technology than Japan and South Korea, although Seoul's Ministry of National Defence claims that it is pursuing an approach common among the Group of Seven nations.

South Korea, like Japan, justifies increased investment with the supposed benefits of applying dual-use technology developed in civilian industry to military ends. But dual-use technologies are not a magical panacea. As demonstrated in Japan's case, the complementary investment in specialised military technologies, whether indigenous or imported under

'co-development' schemes, makes the resultant systems much more expensive than complete systems bought from established suppliers. Japan's F-2 is likely to cost triple what the comparable F-16C does. This great investment holds little prospect of spin-off for the reasons Willett identifies and generally results in less combat capability, judged either absolutely or on the basis of cost-effectiveness. It is this argument as much as concern for the market share of US firms that has led Washington to oppose vanity projects for its allies' defence industries, especially if there is a continuing risk of war. Without cost-effectiveness or cutting-edge technology, there is little hope of significant earnings on the competitive export market. The real reason why states embark on South Korea's course is to have their own defence industry – an increasingly anachronistic ideal.

As suggested by the sudden rush of money into the military-technology base, South Korea is probably over-reaching itself, a mistake Spain also made to its cost in the early 1990s. South Korea has a shorter history of military R&D and arms production than Japan did in 1990 when its military R&D budget reached \$800m. The South Korean civilian-technology base is structurally weak and reliant on Japanese components. This relationship could sour if technology were diverted into military systems, especially for export. South Korea is also unlikely to receive as much help from US firms in developing specialised military technology as Japan did during the Cold War, particularly after the recent imbroglios over the Japanese F-2 and the Israeli *Lavi*. At best, South Korea can only hope for a smaller, frailer version of what Japan has achieved – the ability to build a few very expensive systems with less than state-of-the-art capabilities – while losing its offset countertrade. The prospects of its displacing any of the major arms suppliers are remote indeed.

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