

Merion Station, Pennsylvania

Kay, Zachariah. *The Diplomacy of Prudence: Canada and Israel, 1948-1958*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. xiv+135pp.

Perhaps the best-known episode brought to mind when thinking of Canada and the Middle East during the 1950s is External Affairs Minister Lester B. Pearson's Nobel-Prize-winning proposal to create a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to separate Egyptian and Israeli forces in the wake of the 1956 Sinai-Suez war. While Zachariah Kay devotes surprisingly little attention to that affair, he makes use of hitherto unseen Canadian and Israeli archival records to give an account of the major issues of Canada-Israel diplomatic relations in the first decade of Israel's independence. Each episode and issue covered—the granting of recognition to the Jewish state, aid to Palestinian refugees, the (non-) internationalization of Jerusalem, arms sales, and the Suez-Sinai crisis—provides abundant illustration of the now-legendary caution that characterized the Canadian approach in those days.

Kay's presentation of the period 1948-1958 confirms and extends the picture that emerges from his earlier *Canada and Palestine: The Politics of Non-Commitment* (1978) and David Bercuson's *Canada and the Birth of Israel: A Study in Canadian Foreign Policy* (1985). *The Diplomacy of Prudence* will be best appreciated as a further case study in Canada's quest for an effective and independent role as a "middle power" blessed with the special assets and drawbacks of being (too?) close to both Great Britain and the United States. On the one hand, Canadians did not wish to appear as the "errand-boy" of either of the Great Powers (as they were then called); on the other, many small nations like Israel were no doubt interested in good relations with Canada largely because of its perceived closeness to the U.S. and/or the U.K. Kay's study shows clear-

ly how any Canadian politician who sought to promote pro-Israel policies would have found his or her options limited by: (a) the general, overriding need to steer a neutral Canadian course between conflicting Israeli and Arab claims; (b) the inherent bureaucratic reluctance to take risks; (c) a certain degree of pro-Arab sympathy among career civil servants; and (d) the need to take into account British and American interests and policies. Although Québec and Catholic opinion competed with the pro-Israel lobbying efforts of Canadian Jewish leaders and together they did play some role, this latest work confirms earlier findings that—unlike the situation in the United States—such domestic considerations did not have a determining influence on the shaping of Canadian foreign policy towards Israel.

While the pattern of Canadian prudence repeats itself in all the episodes covered by Kay, it is particularly evident in the long chapter devoted to Israel's request to purchase F86 Sabre jets (manufactured by Canadair under U.S. license) during 1955-56. Kay's tedious meeting-by-meeting, memo-by-memo, statement-by-statement account of this "saga" (Abba Eban called it an "Odyssey") illustrates all the constraints which came into play to repeatedly delay the consummation of the deal until it was suddenly cancelled—apparently on the very eve of the first scheduled deliveries—following the late October 1956 Israeli invasion of Gaza and the Sinai peninsula.

The Diplomacy of Prudence, with its reconstruction of Canadian diplomatic calculations and decisions from hitherto untapped materials in the National Archives of Canada (NAC), merits recognition as a pioneering work. The author interweaves Israeli perceptions of Canadian policymaking through the use of selected files from the Israel State Archives. He also uses *Hansard* and press reviews effectively to offer readers a flavour of how Canada-Israel relations were reflected in the (admittedly secondary) arenas of party politics and public opinion.

Yet, in other ways Kay's narrative and analysis are disappointingly superficial, largely because of the author's over-reliance on a narrow range of archival documentation.

With perhaps the exception of Lester Pearson (whose memoirs were incorporated into Kay's presentation), most of the political actors and civil servants come across as cardboard unidimensional characters. Memoirs and interviews might have been used to enrich the narrative. In particular, this reviewer suspects that much more might have been said about the impact of General E.L.M. Burns on Canadian policy towards Israel, if only Kay had exploited his sources, including the extensive collection of Burns papers at the NAC, more effectively.

Another deficiency of this study is the lack of sufficient context for the reader to situate Canadian policymaking and Canada-Israel relations in the larger picture of international and Middle Eastern moves towards peace and war. Kay provides only the scantiest of British, American or Middle Eastern background against which to situate his micro-analysis of Canadian thinking and action; neither is the reader directed, though footnotes, to helpful secondary sources which could provide such essential background. There are also several instances where Kay himself seems unfamiliar with important aspects of the broader picture. For example, if the author had been familiar with Operation "Alpha"—a top-secret Anglo-American plan which sought to coax Israel's leaders and Egypt's Gamal Abd al-Nasir into face-to-face negotiations—he would not have referred to John Foster Dulles' August 1955 policy statement and Anthony Eden's mediation offer several months later as if they were random events unrelated to a larger plan. While it is unlikely that the Canadian Minister for External Affairs was made privy to Alpha, Kay's narrow focus offers no clues as to what role, if any, Pearson's December 1955 private meetings with Nasir and Moshe Sharett might have played as the sensitive Operation unravelled. Another example of Kay's reconstructing diplomatic history on too limited a range of sources is his failure to incorporate the U.S. perspective, or, at least, to refer readers to relevant primary documents easily available in the published volumes of *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*. This

would have been especially useful in trying to follow John Foster Dulles' apparently zig-zag role in the "Saga of the Unsheathed Sabres" (Chap. VI).

The above criticisms might perhaps be seen as mere academic quibbling if Kay's slim volume nonetheless left us with some clear and profound insights into, and a convincing set of conclusions about, the nature and evolution of Canadian foreign policymaking vis-à-vis Israel. Unfortunately, *The Diplomacy of Prudence* leaves us with neither. Kay's concluding ten pages are mainly a summary, reinforced by truisms and sprinkled with some apparent inconsistencies and highly subjective one- and two-line musings. In earlier chapters, for example, General Burns' influence on senior bureaucrats and on Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent seems crucial; but in the conclusion the General is listed among the "tertiary" factors affecting Canada's policy towards Israel. If General Andrew MacNaughton indeed "tended to side with the Arabs" at the United Nations (p. 103), Kay might have offered some comment on the apparent irony that his son acted as Israel's accredited purchasing agent for armaments in Canada. Some of the "paradoxes" Kay raises do not seem so paradoxical. Above all, the main hypothesis of this study does not stand up well to the question: why—if it is "an axiom in non-messianic times" that "prudence must be a major feature of *any* state's foreign policy," (p. 110 emphasis added)—should prudence be considered the hallmark of a particularly *Canadian* foreign policy? Indeed, that question arose frequently throughout this reviewer's reading of this book.

In the end, one is left feeling both grateful to Mr. Kay for publishing this study, but also certain that there is a need for more rigorous and comprehensive scholarly research on the subject. One way towards a more fruitful and cogent analysis might be to focus more systematically on Canadian policymaking caught in the crossfire of Anglo-Canadian and Canada-U.S. relations, with more exhaustive reference to Canadian, British and American archival source materials. Another approach

might be a more penetrating study of Canadian bureaucratic attitudes and behaviour, focusing more critically on the “imperial” smugness of lacklustre (or inept) officials in their reluctant dealings with “foreigners;” after all, the Canadian diplomatic and bureaucratic establishment of the 1950s was the immediate successor of the one that brought us the “None-is-too-many” approach to Jewish wartime refugees.

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Land of Promise: The Jewish Experience in Southern Alberta, 1889-1945. Calgary: The Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, 1996. vii+270pp.

Land of Promise is an informative photographic history of the Jewish experience in Southern Alberta from 1889 to 1945, with detailed captions and written histories of several Jewish families. This “community album” is expanded from a travelling exhibit of more than four hundred photographs, documents, and family histories which opened at the Calgary Jewish Centre in November 1992. The exhibit subsequently traveled to Fort Calgary and later to Edmonton and Vancouver.

The photographs in this book are divided into sections, each with a brief introduction covering Pioneer Families, Homesteaders, Early Families, Weddings, Hebrew School, I.L. Peretz School, Chevra Kadisha, Synagogues, Military, Organizations, Celebrations, Business, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Small Towns. The photographs and captions offer a personal, visualized account of the experiences of Southern Alberta Jewry. They range from the arrival of the first permanent Jewish settlers in Southern Alberta in 1889, to the establishment of Jewish religious, communal, and educational organizations in Calgary and other Southern Alberta towns, to rural and urban life on the prairie frontier, to Jewish participation in both world wars. At the back is a written section on family histories, which provides an enlightening and often moving account of the