Article Preview:


The third edition of William Quandt's well-known book is a comprehensive review and analysis of American Arab-Israeli policy from 1967 to 2004. As in the previous editions, Quandt pays sufficient attention to the importance of international politics, domestic politics and bureaucratic politics in shaping American foreign policy, but stresses the importance of the thinking of the president and his top advisers. Quandt has used some new documentary material on the 1967 and 1973 wars. He has rewritten the Clinton chapters based on recent accounts by Clinton, Madeleine Albright, Dennis Ross and others, including Robert Malley. As in the second edition, the reader is directed to the web for appendixes. This review concentrates on the Clinton and Bush II years. A review of the first edition covering the Johnson through Bush I years was published in this journal in Volume II, 1993, Number 2.

In the chapter on Clinton's first term, Quandt notes that Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk were the "intellectual architects" of the administration's policy, and that both were associated with the pro-Israeli Washington Institute for Near East Policy and were considered to be admirers of Israel's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin. Thus, as the administration shepherded the Madrid peace process along, Quandt writes, they "firmly sided with the Israelis, insisting that small practical steps needed to be taken first (confidence-building measures), to be followed by agreement on a transitional period, and only later on the final-status issues that were uppermost in the minds of Palestinians." Quandt comments that these negotiations "would proceed without an explicit understanding of where they were headed."

On the question of the extent of the administration's involvement in the 1993 Oslo Accord between Israel and the PLO, Quandt writes that it was "the first Arab-Israeli agreement since 1967 to be negotiated without significant involvement by the United States." The Americans made only "modest" contributions to the May 1994 Cairo Accord on implementation of the Oslo agreement, setting a five-year interim timetable in motion, and to the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement. After unsuccessful Israeli-Syrian talks, Israel then engaged with the PLO to produce the Oslo II agreement in September 1995, which called for phased withdrawals of Israeli forces from three zones of the West Bank over several years and for elections of a Palestinian Authority and president in January 1996.

Quandt's conclusion regarding the Israeli-Syrian talks is that "one sees little sign of an American effort to persuade either [Syrian President Hafiz] Asad or Rabin to cast aside their normal caution and go for broke." On Israeli-Palestinian talks "it was as if Clinton had no views of his own, or as if the United States had no independent national interest at stake...." He writes that "Clinton's unwillingness to take any steps that might be seen as undermining Rabin was perhaps understandable..."