

Matthias Nienkämpfer: Middle Eastern economics and Politics: Co-dependent or Independent? The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Master thesis, IEPS FSV UK Prague, June 2007

(evaluation by Miloš Calda)

Characteristics

Matthias Nienkämpfer presents a treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a new way. His is a combination of very personal, emotional narrative with the analysis of facts based on good research. In addition, he devotes two chapters (5 and 7) to theoretical framework.

In Chapter 5, he compares the definition of the state as presented by Christopher Pierson (Nottingham University) with the political structures in Palestine. Is the Palestine National Authority a State or a Non-State entity? Apart from Pierson, Matthias Nienkämpfer uses the Hobbesian concept of the state as opposed to the state of nature.

In Chapter 7, the author looks at Hamas using the ideas of Abraham Maslow on the development of human needs and motivation. However, he cites Maslow from indirect sources only.

In Chapter 8, Matthias Nienkämpfer writes about „manufacturing consent“. Partly using Chomsky's arguments, he describes the activities of ethnic lobbies in the United States, compares their financial power (especially that of the Jewish/Israeli lobbies and that of the Arab-supporting ones).

Chomsky quoted by the author claims: “Thus propaganda won.” (p. 52). I must ask here: Are people really so gullible? The author of this evaluation spent most of his life under the communist regime, which had full control of the propaganda apparatus, certainly much fuller than any American media conglomerate or tycoon. However, I remember very vividly that it was extremely difficult to come across a real, believing communist in Czechoslovakia prior to 1989. These strange beings appeared to exist on TV screens only. Based on my experience, I am extremely doubtful that human mind can be molded in the way Chomsky suggests. In fact, this experience is confirmed by the quote of the poet and translator of Joyce and Shakespeare (rather than a novelist) Zdeněk Urbánek (p. 10).

In Chapter 6, Matthias Nienkämpfer deals with the reasons why PLO has become so unpopular with many Palestinians and why the rival organization, Hamas, has picked up strength (the thesis was obviously completed before the takeover of Gaza by Hamas). He sees as the main reason PLO's omnipresent corruption, financial irregularities, misappropriation of foreign aid, etc., while, on the other hand, Hamas was able to present itself, credibly to many Palestinians, as a provider of welfare services to those in need.

In Chapter 8, the author compares the „soft“ diplomacy of Israel with that of the Arab states as well as the financial endowment of pro-Israel PACs with the pro-Arab ones and finds a vast contrast favoring the former.

P. 47: Matthias Nienkämpfer quotes (IMHO approvingly) Prof. Beinín saying: „The Bush

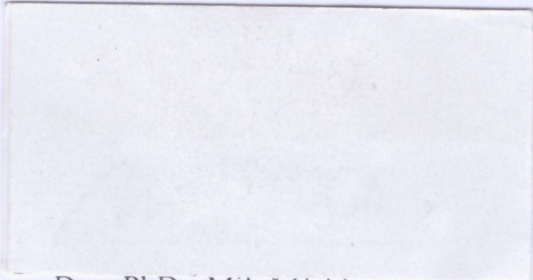
administration's unwillingness to press Israel to ease the occupation... meant that Abbas could not present a credible alternative to Hamas." Does this argument hold water? Is it not rather Israel's as well as Palestinians' responsibility to reach peace based on reasonable compromise? Admittedly, we can hardly expect a culture of political compromise from those who have in their fresh memory bloodshed and misdeeds, of course always attributed to the other side. In addition, the political process in Israel seems to be marred by extortionist dwarf parties that have been able to thwart rapprochement striven by the key players of Israeli politics.

Formal comments:

The author spells „al-Fattah“ (or „Al-Fattah“) with a single „t“, „Border“, not „boarder“. (43)

Evaluation proper

Matthias Nienkämpfer's thesis is well-researched, brings valuable even if sometimes controversial analyses. Several times he gets involved in quite personal, even emotional statements that are rather unusual in an academic discourse. Moreover, his thesis, certainly not lacking general focus, is trying to catch too many rabbits at the same time... The role of the propaganda, corruption, U.S. lobbies, the definition of the State, the ideas of Abraham Maslow, economic factors. This multiplicity perhaps leads to a certain want of coherence. In some sections, however, I found the thesis brilliant, especially where he employs Pierson's concept of the state. I recommend to grade the thesis as "excellent" or "very good", depending on the course of the defense.



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