



Z. Shalom *The Role of U.S. Diplomacy in the Lead-Up to the Six Day War*

(2012). Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 179 pp., \$65, £45.

Moshe Gat

To cite this article: Moshe Gat (2013) Z. Shalom *The Role of U.S. Diplomacy in the Lead-Up to the Six Day War*, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 24:1, 161-163, DOI: [10.1080/09592296.2013.762879](https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2013.762879)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2013.762879>



Published online: 25 Feb 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 74



View related articles [↗](#)

Book Review

Z. Shalom (2012). *The Role of U.S. Diplomacy in the Lead-Up to the Six Day War*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 179 pp., \$65, £45.

Professor Shalom's book is another in a series of studies published over the past decade about the period leading up to the Six Day War. The present study focuses, according to the author, on filling the void in terms of the diplomatic activity between the United States and Israel, and between the United States and Egypt. To some extent, the author successfully depicts the difficult dilemmas faced by the Johnson administration before war broke out, and particularly from 23 May, when Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, declared that the Tiran Straits were closed off to Israeli navigation. The Americans were unwilling to uphold their commitment to ensure free navigation in the Suez Canal—an obligation undertaken following the Suez Canal campaign of 1956. Moreover, the British, who had kept a low profile in this conflict until the crisis began in mid-May, were willing to take action in order to set up a naval task force that would break the blockade; however, the Americans were not willing to partake in or lead the forces. The author is indeed correct in his observation that, aside from being deep in the Vietnamese quagmire, the Americans feared that overly identifying with Israel's plight would irrevocably ruin America's relations in the Arab world.

They therefore conveyed the message to Israel that the United States would not oppose Israeli action designed to ensure navigation. In other words, the Americans in fact gave Israel the green light, contrary to William Quandt's claim that the light given was yellow.¹

Yet the book does not, in fact, focus on the American policy involved in the lead-up to the Six Day War. Much of the book—some 90 of the 162 pages—discusses Egyptian, Jordanian, and Israeli policies, whereas 40 pages of the manuscript are devoted to Syria. Only in the last 60 pages does the author offer any substantial discussion about American diplomatic efforts. Nine chapters into it, the book seems to be less of a single, cohesive unit that follows the chain of events, and more of a selection of different chapters, or chapter-parts, brought together in one publication. A prime example is chapter one on Syria, which clarifies the Egyptian–Syrian agreement reached on 4 November, 1966, only to be later followed by chapter

four that once again discusses Syria and the very same accord (see pp. 9–10, 53–54).

The study ends somewhat strangely on 27 May, with the Israeli Foreign Minister's final meetings with the US administration. The book has no summary and therefore the reason behind ending the discussion in the book with the events of that day remains unclear. It is a known fact that diplomatic efforts continued with fervor beyond that point, with the arrival of Meir Amit, head of the Israeli Mossad, in Washington on 30 May, the British Prime Minister's meeting with President Johnson on 2 June, and the decision made by the US administration to send Vice President Hubert Humphrey to Cairo to meet with the Egyptian President. The meeting between Humphrey and Nasser was made public on 3 June, and on that very day President Johnson sent a letter to Israeli Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol. But the failure to make note of the events that followed 27 May pales in comparison with the even graver error of failing to discuss the role played by the USSR at the time. No research on that period in history is complete without taking a look at Soviet policies, which were undoubtedly key drivers in the lead-up to the 1967 war. The author chose to speak of the Soviets' role in a handful of sentences dispersed throughout the book, although many studies have been published on the subject and could have served as the basis for analysis of its impact and significance.

The book lacks footnotes on which to base the statements and arguments made by the author (see pp. 9–12, 17–19, 21–22 and more). Quotes, too, have no appropriate footnotes. In addition, American documents serve as basis far too often. It is almost as if the paper is merely an archive for the sake of an archive. A prime example would be the mention on p. 115 of a discussion held in the Knesset, which refers readers to an American document rather than to the Israeli Parliament records. Remarks on deliberations among Israeli policymakers too are not based on records found in the Israeli state archives, but on British documents instead. For examples of the overuse of American documents please see chapter six footnotes 13–49 and almost all 65 footnotes in chapter nine. The footnote "*Ibid*" is predominant, sometimes appearing 11 times consecutively. Moreover, the documents used as basis are merely summaries of the discussions or talks held.

A few remarks:

1. On p. 11: Cast Lead Operation began on 27 December 2008 and ended on 18 January 2009, not December 2009.
2. The arguments made about the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Cast Lead Operation in the discussion on the lead-up to the Six Day War are presumptuous and lack historical perspective.
3. The author claims on p. 5 that Israel gained confidence following the Suez Canal Campaign of 1956, and that the fear of conflict with its Arab neighbors subsided, since it had proved its military supremacy over all

Arab armed forces, and especially over Egypt. Please note that the only Arab military force involved in the aforementioned campaign was Egypt's, although the British and French took part in it as well.

4. On p. 39 the author says: "when the question arose in 1967." What question? In what context? The author does not make the reference clear to the reader.
5. The author speaks of "many observers." Who are they? This, too, remains unclear.
6. The author uses the term "Western Power"—does that include France, whose policy differed from that of the UK and US?
7. It is not clear why such a study should have no bibliography.
8. The index is somewhat selective. Among others, it fails to list the following entries: Gaza, De-Gaulle, Eilat, Fowel, IDF, Lebanon, Middle East, Wheeler and Vietnam.

In summary, this topic is indeed fascinating, however, the author failed to provide the reader with the complete picture or study the processes that led to the war in any depth. The book is far too informative, and appears to be a chronology of messages the author summarizes for the reader's convenience out of American documents. As has been said before, this book seems to be no more than a compilation of chapters, or chapter-parts, artificially combined in a manner that lacks continuity of events, does not base arguments through appropriate footnotes, and suffers from repetitiveness. One is left with the impression that the author did not bother to use the literature published before him in order to produce a better manuscript.

NOTE

1. Quandt, W (1993). "Lyndon Johnson, the Middle East and the 1967 War: What color Was the Light?" *Middle East Journal*, 46:2; in this context see also, Gat, M. (March 2003), "Let Someone Else do the Job; American Policy on the Eve of the Six Day War," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14:1, pp. 131–159.

Moshe Gat
Bar Ilan University
Ramat-Gan, Israel