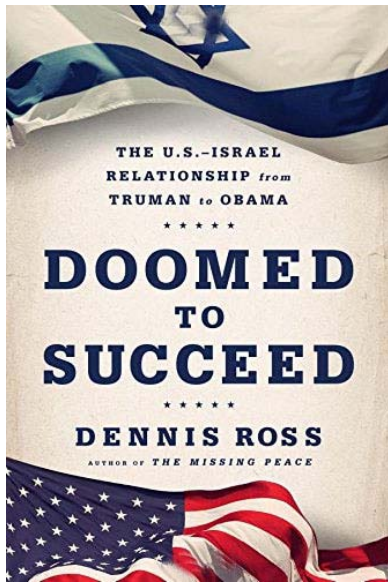


Brief Reviews, Fall 2016



Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama. By Dennis Ross. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016. 512 pp. \$30 (\$17, paper).

In *Doomed to Succeed*, Ross, a diplomat and advisor who served five U.S. presidents, documents the history of the mostly misguided U.S. peace efforts in the Middle East dating back to Franklin Roosevelt. While the early sections are a rehash of well-known facts, the recap is needed to reinforce Ross's thesis that misguided Arabists, who view Israel as a major irritant in relations with the Arab world, have continually and adversely influenced U.S. policy in the region.

Readers familiar with the history of U.S.-Israel relations may want to jump directly to the chapters starting with the

Reagan administration when Ross became personally involved in policy-making. His eyewitness account of decision-making is insightful and reveals the structural, personal, and ideological reasons why the relationship with Israel is close but often turbulent.

Ronald Reagan, for example, despite being revered as one of Israel's best White House friends, could be the most punitive president when Israel angered him. George H.W. Bush's attitudes as vice president foreshadowed his animus toward Israel. Obama was angered by Netanyahu's declaration, prior to his reelection as prime minister, that he would never accept a Palestinian state; Obama considered other comments to be anti-democratic, prompting the president to warn that he would "re-evaluate" policy toward Israel.

Ross was often ostracized or impeded by the Arabists, in part because he did not believe relations with Israel were a zero-sum game in which ties with Arab states would suffer if Washington maintained a close alliance with Israel. Not surprisingly, the Obama State Department withheld the "peace process" portfolio from Ross. But, Obama's early missteps led the administration to bring Ross back to handle Israeli-Palestinian issues.

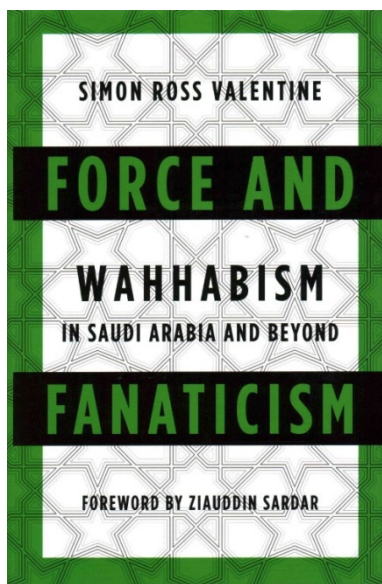
Ross argues that Arab leaders do not particularly care about the Palestinians:

The Palestinian issue has indeed been a centerpiece for Arab leaders, but more to use as leverage against us or against each other.

Ross finds the problem in U.S. Middle East policy boils down to the fact that

too often our policy makers did not understand the fundamental realities in the region ... We not only made basic mistakes, but we repeated these over time. Those past mistakes, and their rationales, continue to echo today.

Mitchell Bard
American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise



Force and Fanaticism: Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond. By Simon Ross Valentine. London: Hurst, 2015. 256 pp. \$34.95.

Valentine, a British Methodist pastor and teacher who taught in Saudi Arabia, has written a useful book about the desert kingdom. Most interesting is its exploration of how the monarchy is “the single greatest force in spreading Islamic fundamentalism”; it “has spent as much as \$100 billion to

spread Wahhabism in the West,” yet “America and Britain have been, and are continuing to be, implicit supporters of Wahhabism.”

Valentine discusses the background of how this “unholy alliance” came about. He warns: “If the West simply ignores it, Saudi Arabia’s role in international terrorism seems likely to worsen rather than conveniently disappear.” This is troubling considering that “ISIS is Saudi Arabia’s latest monstrous contribution to world history.”

The author explores important topics, including the *mutawwa*, or religious police, and provides useful historical context, discussing the origins of Wahhabism, its alliance with the House of Saud, and the oil discoveries that changed everything.

Unfortunately, a large chunk of the book is devoted to separating Islam from Wahhabism, meaning the author never gets to root matters. Anything positive is attributed to Islam and anything negative—misogyny, draconian punishments, execution of apostates, persecution of non-Muslims—to Wahhabism.

This position stems from the author’s own cultural presuppositions. He “felt confused and puzzled” by Wahhabi intolerance and the “attempt to propagate their beliefs by force.” In all his conversations with “ulema, imams, Mutawa and Saudis generally, there was never a mention of ‘love.’” In fact, Islam’s prophet, Muhammad, followed by countless caliphs, did sanction the use of force; and while Islam attributes ninety-nine characteristics to God, love is not one of them.

Valentine’s readers would benefit much more had he simply laid out his useful information concerning the inner workings of the Saudi regime and its unholy alliance with the West, without trying to tackle the deep question of what Islam really is.

Raymond Ibrahim
Middle East Forum