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Introduction by William B. Quandt

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Introduction by William B. Quandt, University of Virginia

James Stocker has written a very well-researched book on the American role in the unraveling of the Lebanese state in the lead-up to the civil war that broke out in 1975. He has reviewed a vast amount of recently declassified material—including the rich trove of taped recordings from the Nixon-Kissinger years—as well as sources in Arabic and French. An Arabic translation is under contract to appear in 2017 or 2018. His basic argument is that the United States did contribute to Lebanon’s collapse, but less by design than by inadvertence, something of a byproduct of its more intentional conduct of the long-running Cold-War rivalry with the Soviet Union in the Middle East, as adjusted to the strategic changes that followed the October 1973 war. I generally agree with that perspective, having seen policy toward Lebanon being formulated for a part of that period as a National Security Council (NSC) staff member in 1972-1974 and again in 1977-1979.

Stocker is careful in his use of the written record, and he examines alternative explanations of controversial points with care. Each of the four reviewers in this Roundtable gives him high marks for his scholarship. Not surprisingly, however, each points to a few issues where they would like to see a stronger argument, or where they feel the evidence does not fully justify the conclusions. Since each of these reviewers is a serious scholar of Lebanon in his own right, we should pay attention to their supportive comments as well as their criticisms.

Osamah Khalil believes that Stocker generally does not go beyond what the evidence supports, but takes exception to Stocker’s interpretation of the so-called ‘Red Line Agreement’ that supposedly governed the rules of the deployment of the Syrian army to south Lebanon, where the risk of clashes with Israeli forces was high. He finds Stocker’s characterization of the Agreement as a “red herring” (171) and “myth” (194) to be “uncharacteristic overstatements.” While I do not have first-hand information on this issue, I do sense that Khalil is correct. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger did favor the entry of Syrian forces into Lebanon in 1976, perhaps with some qualms, and he certainly communicated frequently with the Israelis to try to win their acquiescence. At some point, the Israelis will probably release their records of these communications from Kissinger—they have done so for the 1972-1973 period, and this filled a real gap on the American side, since Kissinger often did not make a record of his conversations with Israel’s ambassadors to Washington, first Yitzhak Rabin and then Simcha Dinitz. Perhaps it is too strong to say that an ‘Agreement’ was reached, but a less formal understanding would have been consistent with other such ‘understandings’ that Hafiz al-Asad had conveyed orally via the Americans to the Israelis as part of the 1973 disengagement agreement. Khalil notes that there are gaps in the American archival record for the March to June 1976 period. It would be helpful for him to spell out more fully what those are.

As`ad AbuKhalil treats Stocker’s book as a “welcome addition” to the literature on Lebanon, but believes the author is too cautious in some of his conclusions. The main point that he insists on is that the U.S. role was more intentionally destabilizing in Lebanon than Stocker is willing to acknowledge. In his view, the lack of archival evidence for a U.S. role in arming some of the right-wing Christian militias does not mean that such arms transfers did not happen. AbuKhalil is correct that such transfers, if they took place, would have been handled by the CIA, and those archives have not been made available. My sense is that a modest supply of arms did go to some of the Christian militias in the early 1970s, although the dominant view in the State Department was to be very wary of getting close to the more militant of the militia leaders. It will probably remain an unanswerable question for some time as to the magnitude and significance of U.S. aid to former Lebanese President Camille Chamoun and the Phalangists. By the time I was in a position to know the details of such transactions in the Carter Administration, such aid had come to an end.

AbuKhalil also points to the extent to which Maronite leaders in the late 1960s and 1970s tried to drag the United States into a direct military role to uphold their sectarian privileges. This was, of course, a very significant factor in the green or perhaps yellow light that the Reagan Administration gave to the Israelis prior to their intervention in Lebanon in 1982, a topic not covered in Stocker's book, but whose roots go back to the 1970s.

Maurice Labelle picks up on this issue of the direct or indirect role of the U.S. in encouraging Lebanese Christian militias to resort to violence. He praises Stocker for putting in place a complex framework to explain Lebanon's descent into civil war, but points out that the Christian sectarians were active players in these events, not just the recipients of arms or of directives from Washington. On occasion, they were able to help shape U.S. policy, an example of a weak player exerting outsize influence on a superpower. While I am not convinced that this was a major factor in Kissinger's dealings with Lebanon—the cold-war mindset was a stronger factor—nonetheless it does seem to have been important in the early 1980s. I have clear recollections of Lebanese Forces' representatives coming to Washington and explaining how a Christian-dominated Lebanon could be a strategic asset for the United States, much like Israel, but with easier access to the Arab world. Small and determined forces can sometimes persuade great powers to do their bidding, and Labelle is right to insist on this point.

Finally, Seth Anziska has provided a mostly laudatory overview of Stocker's book, praising him for showing how Middle East complexities and local power brokers have been able to stymie American grand strategy in the Middle East. Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s was one example of this truth, and of course Iraq in recent years has underscored that reality with even more clarity. Anziska, more than the other reviewers, looks at the dealings of the United States with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon. He believes that the United States missed an opportunity to begin dealing with the PLO in the early 1970s, and he notes Stocker's explanation of the role of domestic American politics. But he, like Khalil, also sees Kissinger's strong dislike for the PLO as a factor, but seems unsure of Kissinger's logic in adopting such a hostile stance.

By now it is fairly well known that the United States did have a relationship of sorts with the PLO in Beirut after PLO leader Yasir Arafat's arrival there in 1971. Robert Ames of the CIA had developed a connection with Ali Hassan Salameh, one of Arafat's intelligence aides. CIA officials claim that Salameh was never a controlled agent, and that may be the case, but he provided a great deal of information about the PLO to the U.S. government, as well as helping to insure the security of the U.S. embassy in Beirut. The Israelis were aware of this channel, and they tried to insure that it did not lead to a full-blown diplomatic channel. In the 1975 disengagement agreement with Egypt, Israel got the United State to make a side agreement with them that specified that the U.S. would not negotiate with or recognize the PLO unless the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted UN Resolution 242 and 338.¹

By this time, of course Kissinger had authorized two direct talks between the CIA, in the person of Deputy CIA Director Vernon Walters, and a PLO official, Khalid al-Hassan, in Morocco. Arafat also used the Beirut

¹ "Memorandum of Agreement Between The Governments of Israel and The United States," Jerusalem, 1 September 1975, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v26/d227>; "2. The United States will continue to adhere to its present policy with respect to the Palestine Liberation Organization, whereby it will not recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization so long as the Palestine Liberation Organization does not recognize Israel's right to exist and does not accept Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338."

channel on occasions to get clarifications on U.S. policy. Egypt and Saudi Arabia also conveyed messages back and forth, although with unhelpful distortions that suited their own preferences. All of this, in my view, shows that the real problem in U.S.-Palestinian relations in this period was not so much the absence of a channel for communication, but rather the lack of a belief on Kissinger's part that the PLO could play a constructive role in the kind of post-1973 order that he was trying to put in place. Jordan, not the PLO, was the party that he, and the Israelis, who had considerable influence over Kissinger's thinking in this regard, wanted to see as the preferred peace partner on Israel's eastern border. That view began to change in the Carter period, but came back in full strength after 1982 and the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut.

Anziska is very measured in his occasional criticism of Stocker's views. At one point he suggests that the book's conclusion that the United States destabilized Lebanon not by design but as a byproduct of its broader regional strategy is too modest. The review leaves the impression that Stocker lets the U.S. off too easily. Anziska argues that more attention should be paid to the U.S.-Israel nexus. While there was not an identity of views, there was certainly a great deal of discussion about Lebanon at the highest levels. Anziska is right to underscore this point.

In conclusion, Stocker will in all likelihood be pleased with the reaction of these four respected scholars to his book. They have taken his argument seriously, have praised his careful use of resources, and have agreed with many of his arguments. The fact that each of them sees other issues, or other interpretations that merit attention, shows that the book is going to generate healthy discussion about the complex causes of Lebanon's tragic descent into civil war. Even this many years later, there are gaps in knowledge, some of which may never be filled, but Stocker's book has taken us further toward a realistic understanding of the many factors that came together in the mid-1970s to trigger the worst civil war that the region has known.

Participants:

James R. Stocker is Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Trinity Washington University. He received his Ph.D. from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. In addition to the work under review here, he is the author of articles in the *International History Review*, the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, the *Middle East Journal*, *Cold War History*, and other publications. His research interests are in the history of U.S. foreign relations, the contemporary Middle East, and the politics of energy.

William B. Quandt taught at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Virginia; was a research scholar at the Rand Corporation and the Brookings Institution, and served on the National Security Council staff with responsibility for the Middle East and North Africa in both the Nixon and Carter Administrations. He is the author of several books, most notably *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, 3rd ed., (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2005), and *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1986).

Seth Anziska is the Mohamed S. Farsi-Polonsky Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Jewish-Muslim Relations at University College London and the 2016-2017 Taub Postdoctoral Fellow at New York University. He received his BA and PhD in History from Columbia University, and his M. Phil. in Modern Middle Eastern Studies from St. Antony's College, Oxford. Seth's research interests include the international history of the Middle East in the 20th century, with a focus on Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and U.S. relations with the wider region, as well as contemporary Arab and Jewish politics and culture. His publications include "Autonomy as State Prevention: The Palestinian Question after Camp David, 1978-1982," forthcoming in *Humanity*

Journal, Special Issue on Transformative Occupation in the Middle East, 8.2 (Spring 2017). Seth is completing a book manuscript tentatively entitled *Preventing Palestine: How Diplomacy Curtailed Statehood*. It is based on his dissertation, "Camp David's Shadow: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinian Question, 1977-1993," which was awarded the 2016 Oxford University Press USA Dissertation Prize in International History.

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Maurice Jr. Labelle is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Saskatchewan. Articles of his have been published in *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of Global History*, and *International Historical Review*. Labelle's current book project explores how postcolonial Lebanon came to identify the United States as an imperial power in the Middle East.

Review by As`ad AbuKhalil, Department of Politics, California State University, Stanislaus

It has become quite unfashionable to write about the Lebanese Civil War. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was quite fashionable to write about the war. Academics and journalists rushed to produce books to explain the origins of the war and its combatants. But the trend subsided, especially once the official end of the war reduced worldwide attention on Lebanon. To be sure, books on Hezbollah continue to come out and the study of the party has occupied many young academics around the world.¹

James Stoker's book is a welcome addition, especially since it covers the first two years of the war—which was a crucial period in the history of Lebanon. And the topic has not been written about in academic studies, although Geir Bergerson Huse wrote an MA thesis at the University of Oslo in 2014 on the very topic.² Both authors rely largely on the same U.S. declassified documents, although Stoker's book is more comprehensive. Furthermore, Stoker draws upon a large set of U.S. declassified documents that are not only related to the diplomatic reports.

Stoker obviously devoted much effort in the preparation of his book, which, unlike many others on the subject of Lebanon, does not contain many errors or mistakes. It is clear that he spent time in Lebanon interviewing people—including those who were mentioned in the documents themselves. There is a reason that this book is an important one and it brings in new original materials: the declassification of the U.S. diplomatic documents under study was far more lax and loose than previous declassifications of U.S. documents relating to Lebanon—even those related to the 1958 Civil War.

Stoker, however, is too cautious in interpreting the material. He absolves the U.S. of responsibility and argues that the U.S. was not directly involved in the triggering the Civil War, and in supplying arms to the right-wing Phalanges and Ahrar militias even when there is evidence that the U.S. had supplied them with arms long before the eruption of the war. Stoker does mention the role of Sarkis Soghanlian in this regard, but distinguishes between American "facilitation" and "direct arming" (15, 18). On the topic of the U.S. resorting to third-party arming, Stoker sticks to the diplomatic dispatches which contain no direct evidence about arming, even though arming of militias is usually the work of covert operations of the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency and would not be covered by diplomatic reports.

The author also adheres too strictly to the literal interpretation of the U.S. documents, which influences his take on the war. He, for example, minimizes the role of class struggle and conflict in the War, although the spark of the War entailed a fishing monopoly company owned by none other than the U.S. ally, and later

¹ See, for example, Melani Camett, *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Cornell University Press, 2014); Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton University Press, 2014); and Joseph Daher, *The Political Economy of Lebanon's Party of God* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

² Geir Bergerson Huse, "A Dangerous Sideshow: The US and the Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1976," MA thesis, University of Oslo in 2014.

warlord, Kamil Sham'un. Later U.S. documents refer to his enrichment from his war role.³ Furthermore, the author covers the impact of the continuous Israeli raids on Lebanon and the harm they inflicted on Lebanese and Palestinian civilians rather too neutrally: he sticks to the coverage in the U.S. documents, which typically exhibit far more concern for Israeli military casualties than Arab civilian casualties. Stoker's book does not capture the humanitarian toll which the Israeli role and attacks took on Lebanon and on the Palestinian refugee population. Stoker's argument would have been enhanced had he consulted with many books in Arabic (and some in English) which give graphic portrayal of the impact of Israeli aggression on Lebanon.⁴

The book, however, probably one of the most important ones to come out on Lebanon in many years. It contains a large amount of original information. It shows beyond a doubt that the U.S. was involved directly with the right-wing militias which played a paramount role in triggering and prolonging the War. The book also shows that the U.S., in the years of the Cold War, looked at Lebanon as a convenient theatre of operation against the USSR. The U.S. viewed Lebanon as an arena where the right-wing death squads of the Phalanges and Ahrar would smash the powerful Lebanese leftist coalition. The U.S. also allowed Israel a free hand in Lebanon to attack what it called 'terrorist bases' even when those attacks repeatedly and consistently harmed Lebanese and Palestinian civilians. The author should be credited for his painstaking research which allowed him to compare various documents and to present a narrative of the Lebanese Civil War (in its first two years) although his narrative is too conservative in implicating the U.S. when the documents themselves implicate the U.S. very early on.

The book will shock many readers in Lebanon because it shows that the Lebanese administrations of Charles Hilu and of Sulyaman Franjiyyah colluded in secret negotiations and agreements with Israel against the Palestinian resistance movement and its Lebanese allies. The book also shows the extent to which Maronite leaders from the 1960s to the 1970s were eager to drag the U.S. into direct military intervention in Lebanon for the sake of preservation of an unjust sectarian order. And most damning for the U.S., its role in arming and supplying (directly or indirectly) the right-wing militias continued and expanded (and some are covered in declassified U.S. documents in this book long after those militias committed various war crimes.

This book is essential for the study of the Lebanese Civil War, and it has become an indispensable part of the scholarly literature on Lebanon. The author, however, should have supplemented the bibliography with more Arabic sources because the arguments contained in the leftist political literature of the times are validated in this book.

³ Huse, 110.

⁴ See Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege, PLO Decisionmaking During the 1982 War*, (Columbia University Press, rev. edition, 2015); Rex Brynen, *Sanctuary and Survival: The PLO in Lebanon* (Boulder: Westview, 1990); Richard Augustus Norton, *Amal And the Shia: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

Review by Seth Anziska, University College London

U.S. Ambassador George M. Lane, who was appointed *chargé d'affaires* at the American Embassy in Beirut in 1976, described the sudden turn of events that led him to his posting. While acting as *chargé* in Mbabane, Swaziland, Lane received a flash telegram from the State Department to return to Washington.¹ The incoming U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, Frank Meloy, and the U.S. Economic Counselor, Robert Waring, had been abducted on their way to a meeting with Lebanese President-elect Elias Sarkis. The Marxist-Leninist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), an influential Palestinian faction founded by the Lydda born doctor and activist George Habash, carried out the operation. The kidnapping of the American diplomats, along with their driver Zohair Mograbi, occurred at the Museum crossing, what was then the frontline between West and East Beirut during the first phase of Lebanon's sixteen-year Civil War (1975-1990). A British Airways employee found the corpses later that evening, lying on the beach at Ramlat al-Baida, in West Beirut, without shoes or socks.² U.S. President Gerald Ford condemned the assassinations and reiterated America's "search for peace" in Lebanon, instructing Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to identify the murderers, while organizing an evacuation of American citizens from the country.³

In the wake of the assassinations, Kissinger debated whether to close the diplomatic post entirely. After two weeks of intensive discussion, Lane was given three hours' notice to prepare for his departure from Washington to Beirut. The newly appointed *chargé* recounted the tortuous process of trying to get there, with the Beirut airport closed and overland routes through Syria proving too dangerous. Flying first to Athens, then to a U.S. Aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean, Lane took a helicopter ride to a landing ship and finally entered the city on the same landing craft that was transporting American evacuees out. "So there I was in my civilian clothes sitting on six pouch bags of communication equipment which I was carrying in, with all these Navy guys in their flak suits and not sure what they were going to run into going into Beirut," Lane recalled.⁴ The State Department had organized security on the beach with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the umbrella organization of the Palestinian national movement, despite a formal ban on relations that Kissinger had put in place in 1975. As Lane explained, "we worked with the PLO to organize the security so that the American civilians, who were moving to this area to get on the landing ship, wouldn't be shot at."⁵ The diplomat's account of the close cooperation between the American government and the PLO on security matters at the time is revealing. It is one of the many aspects of U.S. involvement in Lebanon that does not fit well with the standard account, and it begs the question of American loyalties in the Lebanese civil war. What

¹ Interview with Ambassador George M. Lane, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, VA, www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Lane.%20George.toc.pdf.

² Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 83.

³ "Statement regarding the assassination of our Ambassador in Beirut, Francis E. Meloy, Jr., our Counselor for Economic Affairs, Robert O. Waring, and of their driver, Zohair Moghrabi," White House Press Releases (Ford administration), 16 June 1976, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/7344538>.

⁴ Interview with Ambassador Lane, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*

were the primary aims of the U.S. intervention in Lebanon? How did coordination with the Palestinians cohere with the broader Cold War strategy of Kissinger-era détente? To what extent, if any, did American policy foment internal Lebanese violence and state collapse?

In his richly detailed study of the U.S. intervention in Lebanon between 1967 and 1976, James Stocker addresses the descent of this crucial Middle Eastern state into civil war and the attendant American role in the unraveling. This was a period that aligned with the regional transformation brought about by Israel's victory over its neighbors in the June 1967 War and the onset of the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, Sinai Peninsula and East Jerusalem, a turn of events that rattled the prevailing order of Arab nationalism. It was also a moment that witnessed the Jordanian Civil War of 1970, known as "Black September," which resulted in the expulsion of the PLO from the Hashemite Kingdom and the influx of armed Palestinian militants (*fedayeen*) to Lebanon. Finally, the timeframe aligned with Egypt's bid to break the stranglehold of superpower détente by launching the 1973 War against Israel. While much of this history is often told from the vantage point of Cairo or Jerusalem, Stocker's focus on Lebanon turns the regional perspective on its head. As seen from Beirut, the events of this decade force a reassessment of the influence that local agents exerted on external powers, underscoring the limits of Washington's ability to shape events in the Middle East to its liking.

Stocker's central argument is twofold: the first is that American strategy in Lebanon was "subordinated" to broader strategies in the Cold War and wider Middle East (4). This led to Lebanon's marginalization from its position as a strategic asset to a liability. As American mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict expanded and the civil war broke out, Lebanon became a "potential threat to US interests," one that had to be quarantined from broader regional affairs (5). The second argument of the book is that the U.S. "played a role in the process of Lebanese state collapse" (5). By straddling the line between the maintenance of stability and the exertion of targeted influence among various factions, U.S. policymakers tried to sway the delicate balance of power within a multi-confessional political system. In this way, American diplomacy contributed to Lebanon's travails, although the degree of U.S. agency in the unraveling remains a matter of some interpretation. There were of course many parties who had interests at stake in Lebanon, from Syria to Egypt to the Soviet Union, as well as the PLO and Lebanese factions themselves. A veritable Cold War playground for regional and foreign powers, Lebanon's local reality was always a mirror of broader forces at work.

Spheres of Intervention emerges to fill a crucial gap in U.S.-Middle East history, a field that continues to grow in exciting new ways. In his influential work on the global dimensions of the Cold War, Odd Arne Westad has argued for a greater focus on Western intervention in the Global South.⁶ But the Middle East, and Lebanon in particular, remains under-studied. Stocker's contribution reveals how superpower rivalry and competing ideologies contributed to local violence, with multiple promises of arms and support cycling between various factions. He also suggests that strategic interests were not always clear to U.S. policymakers, and the result was a pattern of "neglect" in which American attention was largely directed elsewhere (9). This aversion to the complexities of local and regional dynamics, what Jussi Hannimaki argues is the "flawed architecture" of Kissinger's foreign policy, may go quite some distance in explaining U.S. behavior in Lebanon

⁶ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

and the wider Middle East.⁷ By privileging disengagement agreements after the 1973 War, in lieu of tackling Palestinian national aspirations, as one example, or upholding Israel's right to respond to border reprisals while ignoring Lebanese concerns for stability as another, American policy "can be seen as deeply complicit in Lebanon's long slide into conflict" (14).

To make his case, Stocker draws on a wealth of new material, from the U.S. National Archives, collections in several Presidential Libraries, private papers, interviews, and crucial Arabic and French sources. He examines the period between 1967-1970 to assess the impact of the June 1967 War and the agreements between Palestinian militias and the Lebanese government that enabled their eventual absorption; the interregnum between 1970-1975 which witnessed the reemergence of Lebanese-Palestinian conflict; and the first two years of the Lebanese Civil War, ending with the Syrian intervention of 1976. The result is a closely written chronological narrative that guides the reader through the vicissitudes of local developments with a constant eye to regional dynamics. The strength of this interplay is to foreground Lebanon's vibrant Arab politics and position Beirut as a geopolitical hub, implicitly de-centering Cairo or Jerusalem as the focal point of U.S.-Middle East relations in the late 1960s and 1970s.

What happens when we look at the region from this vantage point? Arguably, it paves the way for a more textured reading of regional history on its own terms, in which Washington may actually have been peripheral to events on the ground.⁸ At the same time, the specter of arms and military assistance— either directly supplied or through surrogates—underscores how decisively the U.S. was able to exert influence, by omission or commission (63-64). In tandem with the close consultations between U.S. officials in Lebanon and members of the Lebanese government concerning internal security, notably the role of Palestinian *fedayeen* and Israel's military response to their cross-border actions, American influence was contingent on a host of mitigating factors. Stocker pays a great deal of attention to the role of *fedayeen* violence in shifting the calculus of U.S. diplomats, who wavered "between protecting Lebanon and supporting Israel" (97) at a crucial moment in the evolution of the Palestinian strategy of armed resistance.⁹

By the summer of 1973, the pressing question of U.S.-PLO diplomatic relations emerged at the center of events in Lebanon, as well as Middle East policy more broadly. In his memoirs, Kissinger seems of two minds about American overtures to the PLO. On the one hand, he opposed suggestions by State Department "Arabists" that the Organization and its highly visible Chairman Yasser Arafat be engaged directly as part of Egyptian efforts to achieve regional peace.¹⁰ The outbreak of the October 1973 War changed the regional

⁷ Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸ For a striking example of this de-centering elsewhere in the region, see Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹ On this evolution, see Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, The Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post Cold-War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 1029.

equation, with the postwar step-by-step diplomacy obviating the need for substantive consideration of the Palestinian question. Kissinger was acutely aware that Israel would not directly negotiate with the Organization in the context of a peace process, and yet he also had American concerns in mind to stabilize the U.S. position in Lebanon. “We had agreed with Israel not to negotiate with the PLO unless the latter accepted Israel’s right to exist and forswore terrorism,” Kissinger wrote in his memoirs. “But we considered Lebanon a special case.”¹¹ In reconciling the inherent tension of this dual approach, the U.S. mediated through Saudi Arabia and Egypt to avoid “substantive exchanges” with the Palestinians.¹² This became ever more complicated with the Syrian intervention of 1976. As a result, as Stocker suggests in the case of Meloy and Waring’s murder, American interests suffered. “Kissinger prioritized minimizing contacts with the Palestinians over the chance of finding out information regarding the murder of US diplomats” (203). This avoidance of direct negotiations also cut off one possible route to resolving the Lebanese violence, given the PLO’s formidable influence within the country. As Stocker so ably demonstrates, diminished attention to regional concerns actually primed Lebanon for more extensive conflict.

What if the U.S. had engaged with the PLO in this earlier period rather than waiting until U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s recognition of the organization in 1988? Could things have turned out differently in Lebanon or for the trajectory of the Arab-Israeli peace process? In the epilogue, Stocker suggests that Kissinger “was almost single-handedly preventing the United States from engaging with the PLO” (222). The Secretary of State faced intense opposition from his regional ambassadors, particularly Talcott Seelye, who had been appointed to replace Meloy and who believed strongly in direct engagement with the PLO (204). The explanation for Kissinger’s refusal is partly attributed to domestic reasons in Stocker’s account (19, 208), given the impending 1976 Presidential elections and opposition from the American Jewish community. Elsewhere, Stocker has offered a more complete picture of Kissinger’s approach regarding engagement with the Palestinians.¹³ He suggests that Kissinger kept his options vis-à-vis the Palestinians in Lebanon somewhat open, as he “wanted to maintain a maximum degree of flexibility for the future evolution of US mediation” (209). Ultimately, however, Kissinger’s logic remains opaque. While key Palestinian leaders were open to a negotiated settlement with Israel in 1973, others remained opposed (124). This dissonance comfortably suited the calculated but unsuccessful regional aims of Gerald Ford’s administration.

Stocker concludes that Jimmy Carter’s election in November 1976 contributed to the ultimate lack of movement by the Ford administration in Lebanon. In his view, Ford’s “electoral defeat dampened what might have otherwise been seen as a case of relative success for Kissinger’s foreign policy. The secretary of state had not welcomed the violence in Lebanon, but he had endeavored to shape the course it eventually took” (220). As Ford and Kissinger left office, Lebanon smoldered. The PLO was weakened while Syria gained a decades-long foothold as an occupier of the country. Kissinger’s vision of détente, resting as it did on great power manipulation and rivalry, therefore contributed to and sustained local conflict in the course of an internecine

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1042.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ James R. Stocker, “A Historical Inevitability? Kissinger and US Contacts with the Palestinians (1973-1976),” *The International History Review*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2016.1189952>.

civil war. While the U.S. is certainly not the only or primary party to blame for this violence, its agency in fomenting local conflict for geopolitical gain is indisputable. So is Stocker's conclusion too modest?

In judiciously weighing the trove of newly available material on Lebanon, Stocker's restraint and command of the sources enables a multifaceted and contingent analysis of the U.S. intervention. This is no small order for a topic that, as the author correctly points out, has been the subject of conspiracy and conjecture (1-3). Intent and causality are tricky to prove, and Stocker manages to sidestep this pitfall by suggesting that U.S. action, as well as passive neglect, are two sides of a coin (224). But is it ever appropriate to assign blame? How can American agency in the disintegration of a small state be accounted for? The same question can be asked of Israel, of Syria, of the PLO, internal Lebanese actors, and many others. It is clear that the groundwork for even greater violence was sown during the period under examination in this book. By combining a Lebanese perspective with these wider currents, *Spheres of Intervention* links the global Cold War story with the dynamics of internal rivalries and ideological competition. American intervention, in Stocker's account, is but one piece of a much wider puzzle.

Although Meloy and Waring were kidnapped as they crossed Beirut's green line, George Lane did eventually make it to the official meetings in the Eastern half of the seaside capital. During a 1976 visit with Lebanese Christian leaders, the American diplomat brought a sympathetic message of reconciliation to assuage their growing concerns as they grappled with the political impasse facing the country. The U.S., Lane told his interlocutors (with a strong whiff of sectarianism), did "not want to see the Christians absorbed into Moslem society or dominated by it" (214). Furthermore, the American government, which had resisted direct military aid to the Christian militias, now "encouraged outside support for the Christians in order to prevent this" (214). It was a surprising about face after the concerted efforts by Christian leaders to solicit direct support for military assistance to oust the Palestinians from the country had not previously met with any success.

Fearful as the Christian leaders were of their diminishing influence in a confessional political system, the assembled leaders were willing to look for external support wherever they could find it. Camille Chamoun, the former Lebanese President (a position always reserved for a Christian), made this very clear during the meeting with Lane. Stocker recounts how Chamoun "stressed his support for Israel," whose existence he saw as "essential for the safety of Lebanon" (214). These sentiments also had a mirror in the Israeli military, intelligence, and political establishments, and they require further attention. Stocker discusses Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's view on the de facto partition of Lebanon, which the United States strictly opposed (173), but Israeli archives yield a great deal more about the sustained effort to influence domestic politics in their northern neighbor. The longstanding Maronite-Zionist alliance predated Israel's creation in 1948, and Lebanon's in 1943, but it took on new significance in the post-1967 era.¹⁴ It is yet another aspect of the external interventions that help explain Lebanon's rapid collapse.

Maronite anxieties, as well as American and Israeli allegiances, soon collided in violent and troubling ways. The victims would be the Palestinian civilians living in Lebanon, a large number of whom had fled their homes in what became Israel during the 1948 War. Insisting that the bulk of these Palestinians had to leave Lebanon, Chamoun asked Lane what the U.S. government would do with a large "foreign refugee population" (214)? In a chilling answer to his own question, as Stocker unearths, the former Lebanese President asserted that "You would have killed more of them than we have and you would have been right"

¹⁴ See Kirsten E. Schulze, *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

(214). This toxic line of eliminationist thinking by a leading political figure was not merely heated rhetoric. One can look at the minutes of the meetings between American and Israeli diplomats on the eve of (and during) the Sabra and Shatila massacre in September 1982 to appreciate how it was later deployed in the midst of actual killing by Christian Phalangist militiamen, with unwitting U.S. complicity and Israeli support.¹⁵ The persistence of this warlord logic underscores the importance of the history Stocker brings to light for assessing American culpability in Lebanese violence. *Spheres of Intervention* is both an invaluable repository that unearths a great deal of new material in granular detail, and a sophisticated analysis of a series of complex and shifting relationships at a formative moment in the region's modern history. Scholars and the wider public can begin to draw conclusions that are illuminating not only for the history of American policy towards Lebanon, but U.S.-Middle East relations writ large.

¹⁵ See Seth Anziska, "A Preventable Massacre," *The New York Times*, 17 September 2012.

Review by Osamah F. Khalil, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University

Henry Kissinger has not held an official position in Washington in four decades, but the former Secretary of State still casts a long shadow over America's foreign policy. A 2015 snap poll of International Relations scholars found that over 32 percent considered Kissinger the "most effective Secretary of State in the past 50 years."¹ Presidential candidates seek his counsel and eagerly declare his approval of their foreign policy positions and proposals. A new Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs was recently established at the Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies in Washington. Yet for all the accolades, Kissinger remains a controversial figure.²

The Lebanese Civil War erupted less than a year after President Richard Nixon's resignation from office and during a period of Kissinger's unrivaled influence at the State Department. Although it is discussed in two of Kissinger's memoirs, the American role in the conflict has received limited coverage. James Stocker's *Spheres of Intervention* is a welcome examination of the early stages of the Lebanese Civil War (often referred to as the 'Two-Year's War'). With competing factions and narratives and an incomplete archival record, writing a history of the Lebanese civil war can be a thankless task. *Spheres of Intervention* raises important questions about the policies of the United States (U.S.) in the Middle East during the Cold War and their immediate and long-term implications.

The book's earliest chapters are its strongest. Drawing on a number of archival and secondary sources, Stocker places Lebanon in the broader context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and regional competition between Arab state and non-state actors. He details the foundations of strife and the motivations of the different factions. With a failing war in Vietnam and Israeli regional military supremacy, Stocker demonstrates that Lebanon was not a priority for American policymakers.

Through most of the book, Stocker is careful not to overstate the available evidence. Unfortunately, he abandons that caution when discussing the tacit arrangement between Israel and Syria over intervening in Lebanon. As Stocker notes, these discussions were mediated by Washington and Amman. Yet Stocker did not have access to the Jordanian or Syrian archives and did not use the Israeli archives. In addition, there are gaps in the American archival record for the critical March to June 1976 period. Therefore, his dismissal of the so-called "Red-Line Agreement" as a "historical red herring" (170) and "myth" (94) are uncharacteristic overstatements. Even though a 'smoking gun' may not be available, Syria's intervention closely followed Israel's conditions as expressed in public statements and private conversations with Kissinger. Ultimately, neither the United States nor Israel objected to Syria's invasion and the continued denials by former Syrian officials of such an arrangement are not surprising.

Stocker is also cautious when describing Kissinger's role in encouraging Syria's intervention. Yet in a series of conversations in late March between Kissinger and Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz, it was the American

¹ TRIP Snap Poll III: Seven Questions on Current Global Issues for International Relations Scholars, 25 January 2015, <https://data.itpir.wm.edu/reports/2014/2015Snap.pdf>.

² For example, see the H-Diplo Roundtable Review XVIII, 3 (2016) of Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger. Volume I. 1923-1968: The Idealist* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015) via <http://www.tiny.cc/Roundtable-XVIII-3>.

Secretary of State who lobbied the reluctant Israelis to support a Syrian invasion. Kissinger hoped that the Syrian army would decisively defeat the joint forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese National Movement. When this did not occur, he repeatedly warned that Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad would be overthrown and a more 'radical' regional alignment would emerge stretching from Iraq to Libya. A month after Jimmy Carter's victory in the Presidential election, and as a cease-fire held in Lebanon, Kissinger met with ambassador Dinitz and Israeli Defense Minister Shimon Peres in Washington. Kissinger explained that the mission by former American Ambassador to Jordan Dean Brown, ostensibly to mediate a resolution to the conflict, had helped strengthen the position of the Lebanese Christian militias and "changed the strategic situation." While he hailed Asad's decision to intervene ("It took a real statesman to see that Syria should and could turn against the PLO"), Kissinger added that "Asad's situation is much much better for us than in 1975. He totally distrusts the Soviets now; he understands the situation. He's stuck in Lebanon."³ Without the benefit of the Israeli, Soviet, and Syrian archives, greater understanding of the Jordanian role, and further declassification of relevant State Department telegrams, it is premature to argue that Kissinger was a 'reluctant' supporter of Syria's intervention.

Moreover, Kissinger's antagonism toward the PLO cannot be underestimated. Stocker missed an opportunity to examine how the PLO's diplomatic initiatives from 1973-1976 may have contributed to Kissinger's decision-making on Lebanon. For example, a secret memorandum of understanding that accompanied the 1975 Sinai II Agreement between Egypt and Israel placed limits on Washington's ability to recognize the PLO. The United States also agreed to block peace proposals that were deemed "detrimental to the interest of Israel."⁴ While Stocker discusses the impact of Sinai II on Syria and Lebanon, the PLO is overlooked. Nor would greater emphasis on the PLO have detracted from the book's main focus. Indeed, Stocker is to be commended for discussing the PLO's important role regionally and in Lebanon prior to the civil war. Although the PLO's archives are either lost, destroyed, or restricted to select researchers, there are published collections of documents available that offer the perspective of the organization and its different factions. These were not cited and they would have broadened Stocker's discussion of the PLO and its goals.⁵

Spheres of Intervention also would have benefited from expanding the landscape of Lebanon's contentious politics. The campuses of the American University of Beirut and the Beirut Arab University witnessed protests, rallies, and speeches by major figures. These were covered in the local and student press and monitored by the U.S. Embassy.⁶

Although Kissinger has been portrayed as an intellectual giant – and he has encouraged this depiction -- the available American documents related to the Lebanese civil war reveal a different individual and temperament.

³ Osamah F. Khalil, "The Radical Crescent: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Lebanese Civil War, 1973-1978," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27:3 (September 2016): 511-512.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 504.

⁵ See the *International Documents on Palestine* series in English and Arabic published by the Institute for Palestine Studies.

⁶ See Betty Anderson, *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

The bold and imaginative thinker is absent. Instead, Kissinger repeats overly dramatic scenarios based on uncertain evidence and wildly exaggerates the potential risk to American interests in the region. In short, he is a pale imitation of the wise diplomat that appears in the pages of his memoirs.

I raise these points not to criticize *Spheres of Intervention*, but to note some issues that it does not resolve and that scholars will likely continue to debate. *Spheres of Intervention* is a welcome addition to the emerging literature on the U.S. and the World and America's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Review by Maurice Jr. Labelle, University of Saskatchewan

Arab winds of change blew toward the West at long last, or so Camille Chamoun hoped (and claimed) in the wake of the 1967 war. As a period of societal reflection and self-criticism in Lebanon followed the *naksab*,¹ the former Lebanese President turned to the United States to buttress his own shade of Lebanese nationalism, which was deeply colored by the modern culture of sectarianism.² On behalf of Lebanese Christians, Chamoun called upon Washington in late June 1967 to uphold the land of cedars' "pro-Western orientation and free enterprise system."³ Utilizing the global Cold War's way of seeing, he sought to maintain Lebanon's perceived historical place as a special haven for Christians in the Middle East. The last thing Chamoun wanted, at least from what he told U.S. officials, was the "forcing of Lebanon to the left or into closer association with the socialist Arab states" by Lebanese Muslims. Lebanese Christian leaders—that is, the recently formed Hilf/Tripartite Alliance of "[Chamoun], Raymond Eddé, and Pierre Gemayel"—needed to defend the sectarian status quo. And, to best "fight the battle" in Lebanon, they required U.S. support, preferably in the form of "either arms or money."⁴

From 1967 to 1976, Chamoun and his allies did not relent in their demands for U.S. support. The United States, following every request, and there were many, [re]contemplated its place in Lebanon. Chamoun's timely June 1967 appeal moved U.S. officials in Beirut. They believed that "Chamoun [wa]s sincere in seeking money and arms [,] not to enforce Christian dominance but rather to counterbalance pressure coming from Nasserists, Communists countries, and Leftists in general." They were also, however, paradoxically persuaded by his sectarianized outlook, in that post-1967 Lebanon "need[ed a] strong Christian right to make [the] system balance and compromise work."⁵ Chamoun, in other words, skillfully approached U.S. officials with the paradox of sectarianism, which implies that "sectarian difference proved integral to the making of the [Lebanese] nation[,] while national unity was forged through the making of sectarian difference."⁶ Put differently, sectarianism was simultaneously the Lebanese state's best friend and worst enemy.

¹ The term "*naksab*," which means reversal in Arabic, was taken from a 9 June 1967 speech by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, whereby he publicly admitted Arab defeat to Israel and submitted his resignation. Nasser used the term to emphasize that the defeat to Israel represented a mere setback within the long process of Arab decolonization in the world. See, for instance, Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 340.

² For more on the modern culture of sectarianism in Lebanon, see Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

³ Middleton to State; 5 July 1967; National Security Files, Files of the Special Committee of the NSC, "Lebanon," Box 5, Lyndon B. Johnson Library (LBJL).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism*, 25.

Cognizant of this self-contradiction, but convinced of its reality nonetheless, U.S. officials in Beirut and policy-makers in Washington undertook a thought-process that lasted roughly nine years, questioning “whether the requests of Christian leaders for arms and money [were] based on sound judgement or on emotion coupled with desire to take advantage of the present situation to enlist U.S. sympathy for their political ambitions.”⁷ The United States, it reasoned at the time, should not become a bystander of postcolonial Lebanon’s perceived [dis]order of things. Its challenge was to develop an approach that projected U.S. neutrality in the Middle Eastern public sphere, strengthened U.S. national security, and indirectly supported Chamoun and his allies, *without* necessarily telling them.

The historical question over how Washington should secretly aid the likes of Chamoun and informally intervene in Lebanon is at the heart of James Stocker’s *Spheres of Interventions*. More specifically, Stocker examines U.S. foreign policy leading up to and during the first eighteen months of the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990. He argues that global Cold War and regional considerations, mainly linked to the flawed Arab-Israeli “peace process,”⁸ guided Washington’s approach to Lebanon (4 and 221). Instability in Lebanon did not endanger the stability of the Middle East, as far the U.S. government was concerned. Lebanon, Stocker insists, was the object of U.S. neglect. U.S. foreign policy was the product of Lebanon’s subservience within Washington’s greater Middle East strategy. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s “flawed architecture,” therefore, contributed to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 (9).

Spheres of Intervention reveals how U.S. policy exacerbated what Edward Said, in a September 1975 unpublished essay, termed Lebanon’s “crisis of representation.” According to Said, “No single [Lebanese] group represent[ed] either a decisive majority of people” or “a decisive majority of ideas.” This very gap, perpetuated by the modern culture of sectarianism, its inherent paradox, and national politics, was at the origins of the civil war itself and reflected “the sorrows of Lebanon.”⁹ By choosing to support the arming of so-called Christian militias via Israel and others, U.S. foreign policy expanded the space in between Lebanese, when it arguably intended to narrow it by bringing Lebanese closer together under the political umbrella of sectarianism. Washington did not want a civil war in Lebanon, but it did empower sectarian differences, both imagined and real, beyond the tipping point and, therefore, “played a role in the process of Lebanese state collapse” (4).

U.S. foreign policy, Stocker convincingly argues, “contributed to the willingness of the Lebanese Christian militia to resort to violence” (15-16). As far as I can tell based on my reading of *Spheres of Intervention*, Washington gave Lebanese Christian sectarians the green light by *not* firmly opposing their military mobilization and *not* firmly decrying their use of violence, particularly against Palestinians. Nor did it denounce their Israeli supplier or Syria’s 1976 military intervention, which leaned in their favor. With no red

⁷ Middleton to State; 5 July 1967; National Security Files, Files of the Special Committee of the NSC, “Lebanon,” Box 5, LBJL.

⁸ Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013); and Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

⁹ “The Sorrows of Lebanon;” Box 65; Folder 9; Edward W. Said Papers; Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

light, Chamoun and his allies proceeded with a general assumption of U.S. consent until told otherwise. Ultimately, a designed image of ‘non-intervention’ facilitated the United States’ indirect intervention in Lebanese affairs.

Stocker deserves much praise for crafting a very complicated narrative, inter-weaving local, national, regional, and international dimensions. Simply put, the story that *Spheres of Intervention* tells is one that is now better understood and will hopefully contribute to greater Lebanese reconciliation in the present and future. The origins of the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990, as he makes clear, did not reside solely within Lebanese society itself. Palestinians, Israelis, Americans, Syrians, and Egyptians, just to list a few, impacted Lebanese affairs and the outbreak of a deadly, long conflict. We now definitively know that foreign spheres of intervention, to borrow from the title of Stocker’s book, were central to post-1967 Lebanese affairs.

But what role did the local(s) play in shaping foreign decision-making and involvement? In fairness to Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention* skillfully incorporates a dizzying array of Lebanese contexts and leading actors, like Chamoun. Yet Lebanese agency, particularly that of Christian sectarians, is underplayed. Accordingly, Stocker’s over-arching narrative inadvertently reifies Kissinger’s ‘flawed architecture:’ international and regional agents of change overshadow Lebanese ones.

Could it be that Chamoun’s strategy when requesting U.S. support was not just about arms and funds? What if an additional major objective of his was to initiate a sectarianization of U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis Lebanon? Surely, he and his allies wanted the U.S. government to at least partly view the nascent conflict in Lebanon through their sectarian lens, which aligned itself nicely with a global Cold War mentalité. Lebanese stubbornness and/or desperation aside, this may further explain the noteworthy relentlessness behind Lebanese requests for U.S. support. If the United States suddenly changed its mind and offered up aid that was one thing, but making sure that Washington did not stand in their way was another.

Chamoun and his allies, in their numerous meetings with U.S. officials, invoked the culture of sectarianism as a means to intervene in U.S. thinking and actions, to their perceived mutual benefit. A deeper reading on Stocker’s part of this discursive initiative, which can surely be located within the pages of Gemayel’s *Al-Amal* daily newspaper, for instance, could unearth Lebanese origins within a larger process of U.S. foreign policy-making.¹⁰ The latter, after all, often somehow involved non-Americans. We know that such ways of seeing traveled into U.S. imaginations, but how and where were they initially formed? A firmer understanding of key situational Lebanese processes of sectarianization themselves, alongside their impacts on both national politics and international affairs, are sorely needed to side-step the perilous traps of global sectarian thought.

All in all, Stocker rightly contends that Lebanon was a pawn in the United States’ Middle East strategy. Yet Washington was equally a pawn in Lebanese strategies to internationalize the Civil War immediately following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. The making of a sphere of intervention is a *relational* process. Just as much as so-called Christian Lebanon was a sphere of U.S. intervention circa 1975, U.S. foreign policy was also a Lebanese Christian sectarian sphere of intervention. Historiographically speaking, this architectural flaw

¹⁰ For a detailed exploration of the Lebanese press at this time, see Anis Moussallem, *La presse libanaise : Expression du Liban politique et confessionnel et forum des pays arabes* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1977).

represents the sorrows of the United States in Lebanon, as well as Arab-U.S. relations more broadly, in our current transitional age of post-Orientalism.

Author's Response by James R. Stocker, Trinity Washington University

For Americans visiting the Middle East, Beirut has become cool again. With so many countries of the region in turmoil, U.S. students, academics, journalists, activists, tourists, and many others descend upon Lebanon in the thousands each year. This is in spite of the fact that the southern part of the country remains restricted to visitors and occupied by an entrenched military group; the country's second largest city witnesses periodic gun battles between rival gangs; trash services have been experiencing a serious crisis for several years; and hundreds of thousands of refugees live in improvised camps without access to basic social services.

The description in the last sentence pertains to Lebanon today, but if you substitute problems with the postal service for the issues with trash pickup, and Palestinian for Syrian refugees, it could almost describe the situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the period in which the events in *Spheres of Intervention* unfold. Just as today the region's politics have been shaped by the recent uprisings in many Arab countries, so, too, was the Middle East then in the midst of transformations in the aftermath of the 1967 war. Lebanon at the moment seems to be holding things together, but in these earlier times tensions tore the country asunder, much like they have done to Syria since 2011.

I wish to thank Seth Anziska, As'ad AbuKhalil, Osamah Khalil and Maurice Jr. Labelle for their considered reviews of my book. I am also grateful to William Quandt for his introduction, as well as to Thomas Maddux, Diane Labrosse and the rest of the H-Diplo staff for putting this roundtable altogether. The reviewers' observations and criticisms highlight many of the issues at the heart of U.S. relations with the Middle East during the Cold War, as well as key interpretative issues related to the Lebanese Civil War and its connection to the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly as it concerns the Palestinian issue. I will address each of the reviewers' comments in order, while also making references to places where their criticisms overlap.

This work applies methodologies of international history to U.S. relations with the Middle East and the Lebanese Civil War. As Anziska rightly notes in his eloquent review, Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* has had an enormous influence on historians looking for ways to explore Western intervention in the Global South. Ironically, Westad's work downplays the influence of these tendencies on the Arab-Israeli conflict, arguing that regional forces there played a much stronger role than the global dynamics that played out in other areas.¹ In this view, if broader global trends are like a swift-moving creek, this sub-region (at least as concerns the Arab-Israeli conflict) more closely resembles an exceptional eddy, whose swirling currents prevent global forces such as the U.S. and the Soviet Union from dominating the regional.

Cases such as the Lebanese Civil War, undoubtedly caused in large part by the Arab-Israeli conflict, demonstrate the difficulty of completely untangling these global and regional currents. But to understand the conflict, the effort needs to be made in spite of the challenges involved. While many existing scholarly accounts of the Lebanese Civil War emphasize domestic and regional factors, rather than global ones, the war is also frequently characterized as what Lebanese journalist and publisher Ghassen Tueni called "a war for the

¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

others,” including the global superpowers.² It was clear that global powers such as the U.S. and the Soviet Union were involved in some way in the events in Lebanon, but the exact nature of their role has remained the subject of speculation. With the opening of the American and other archives from this period, crucial details can now be explored by historians, both international and local.

What emerges is a story of changing interests and misplaced hopes. At the outset of the period covered in this book, Lebanon’s President Charles Helou enjoyed the confidence of U.S. ambassador Dwight Porter, who steadily advocated for U.S. support for the Lebanese government. As Helou’s situation grew increasingly precarious, Porter even encouraged the Nixon administration to view sympathetically a series of requests to arm Christian militias as a balance against the growing power of the Palestinian Fedayeen, which was seen by National Security Adviser and future Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon (though not necessarily by the State Department) as manifestations of pro-Soviet sentiments, rather than as expressions of Palestinian nationalism and anti-colonialism (55).

Although this appeared to be a near textbook case of Cold War interventionary planning, just four years later, the U.S. calculus was turned on its head for several reasons. First, American involvement in Vietnam and domestic crises had undermined the U.S. will to intervene abroad, at least to an extent. Second, in the aftermath of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy required American diplomats to maintain credibility with the Arab-Israeli conflict’s major protagonists, the majority of which were also involved in Lebanon to some degree. Arming the Rightist militias would have upset U.S. relations with Syria, Saudi Arabia, and possibly Egypt, too, thereby putting it out of the question. Third, Helou’s successor Suleiman Frangie had poor relations with U.S. Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley and annoyed Kissinger by insisting on a U.S. apology for an alleged diplomatic slight during a visit to New York. Trust and confidence are key to the sponsor-client relationship, and those were simply absent under Frangie. All of this militated against the likelihood of an American intervention.

The relationship between the U.S. government and the Lebanese Right is crucial to understanding the U.S. role in the outbreak of the war, and is the subject of the first of two criticisms by AbuKhalil, who in addition to this roundtable has published a more extensive review of this work (and other works) in a series of articles in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Akhbar*.³ AbuKhalil claims that my book “absolves the US of responsibility” for the war, in part by sticking narrowly to the available documentation regarding the arming of the Christian militias. He is right that my work insists on documentary evidence, but overstates the case when he charges that I completely ignore U.S. responsibility. In fact, the book’s argument is that the “United States can be seen as deeply complicit in Lebanon’s long slide into conflict.” (14) As AbuKhalil notes, this book reveals evidence concerning the role of the infamous arms dealer Sarkis Soghanalian in importing weapons to Lebanon with the assistance of the U.S. government. The U.S. drew up contingency plans to provide more than 3000 weapons to the Phalange in 1969-70 in the event of a confrontation that threatened the Lebanese government. However, there is no evidence that these particular arms were delivered, and the Lebanese Civil War did not actually break out until five years later, in 1975. This is the case, even though there is some

² Ghassan Tuani, *Une guerre pour les autres* (Paris: Editions Lattés, 1985).

³ As’ad AbuKhalil, “Thus America Ignited the Civil War” [Hakadha ash’alat amirika al-harb al-ahaliyya], 11-part series, *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, August-November 2016, available at www.al-akhbar.com.

evidence that weapons were indirectly supplied to the militias in the period between 1973 and 1975, including via the Lebanese army (131-133).

As I discuss above, one of the primary interpretive challenges of this work was explaining why the U.S. was so prepared to support the right-wing Christian militias in 1969-70, but seemingly unwilling to do so just a few years later. While it is not impossible that the CIA and DIA were covertly assisting these groups in arming, I stick to my conclusion that by 1975, the U.S. had no intention to arm the Christian militias directly. There is no doubt that the United States and a number of other countries did support factions in Lebanon against the Palestinian militias and the rising Lebanese Left. Had it been possible to recreate a scenario similar to the 1970 Jordanian Civil War, in which government forces uprooted and expelled the Palestinian militias, I believe this would have found a great deal of support within the U.S. government. The reality, however, is that many in the State Department and elsewhere in government presciently understood that this would not work, since it would likely cause the Lebanese army to fragment along sectarian lines. Increasingly, over the course of the Nixon and the Ford administrations, U.S. officials moved away from this strategy, including abandoning the idea of providing arms directly to the militias.

If the term ‘international history’ is to have any meaning at all, it must help to move historical accounts beyond national narratives that limit our understanding of events. Yet in doing so, it cannot afford to ignore existing explanations of events. AbuKhalil’s second criticism is that *Spheres of Intervention* ignores Lebanese Leftist interpretations of the conflict, even though (in his view) the evidence it presents supports these interpretations. The Leftist interpretation of the Civil War, at least as I understand it, places responsibility for the war primarily on 1) Lebanon’s unrepresentative sectarian political system, 2) the country’s socio-economic problems including corruption and inequality, and 3) the meddling of foreign actors in political affairs of Lebanon and the Arab world.⁴ It is obvious to nearly all observers that Lebanon’s political system is deeply flawed and contributed in some way to the conflict (10); the question is whether another system would have been better. Economic issues are not the primary focus of this book, although I do attribute to them a role in bringing about the conflict (10-11, 128-129).

In regards to the involvement of foreign actors, although the book focuses on the United States, many other outside actors were involved in Lebanon, as well. In the Leftist interpretation, some of these interventions were justified based on common Arab identity and a supposed duty to support the Palestinian resistance, and then later, by extension, allies of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon. One might as well claim that the evidence supports the Rightist narrative of the war, in which a small, beautiful, diverse, open, and tolerant country gets swept up in regional and international currents, as well as dominated by outside actors in the form of the Palestinian refugees, whose militarization threatened and ultimately uprooted this delicate ecosystem.

After the outbreak of the war, the conflict began to follow a course that just a few years earlier would have likely resulted in the U.S. invoking its contingency plan to arm the militias. Until the beginning of 1976, the Lebanese army could have—at least in theory—intervened in the violence. However, the collapse of the army in the early months of the year prevented this from happening. With the army immobilized, what had started off as a bloody standoff threatened to turn into a rout of the Christian Rightist forces. This would have put

⁴ See, for instance, Muhsin Ibráhím, *The War and the Experiment of the Lebanese National Movement* [Al-harb wa tajribat al-harakat al-wataniyyat al-lubnaniyya] (Beirut: Bayrut al-Masa’, 1983).

the Lebanese Left—supported by the PLO and other Palestinian groups—in charge of a new Lebanon with a reformulated system of government and newly confrontational political system; that is, if Israel itself did not intervene in Lebanon first, potentially sparking a new, region-wide war. These changed circumstances threatened to move the PLO out of the Syrian orbit and produce a new, hostile ‘confrontation state’ against Israel, as well as possibly an Israeli intervention that would have resulted in it occupying the territory of yet another neighboring state.

It was at this time that a key event occurred, at least according to many standard narratives of the war. A series of backchannel communications brokered by the United States between Syria and Israel resulted in the so-called ‘Red Line Agreement,’ which allegedly contained a set of conditions for a Syrian intervention that would trigger an Israeli counter-response. In his probing review, Osamah Khalil maintains that I overstate the evidence when I dismiss this ‘agreement’ as a “historical red herring” (171) and “myth” (194), and that my judgment comes too soon, given that Israeli, Jordanian, and Syrian archives on the subject remain to be analyzed. Regarding the latter point, it is true that key document collections could shed light on this issue. However, I stick to my contention that this agreement has been vastly misrepresented.

There is no doubt that in March 1976, U.S. officials held discussions with both Syria and Israel, as well as with other countries such as Jordan and France, that seem to have been designed to facilitate a Syrian intervention. The so-called ‘red lines’ were conveyed privately and publically at that time and subsequently. But the key point is that no agreement was reached. Until the intervention at the end of May and beginning of June, Kissinger and his colleagues were doing everything they could to try to prevent a Syrian intervention, precisely because there was no agreement.

Khalil seems to be suggesting that it is more likely that Syrian leaders are simply lying, and that some arrangement was in fact made with Israel. This is not impossible, as I contend in the book. Indeed, *Spheres of Intervention* admits that more specific assurances may have been conveyed via King Hussein of Jordan, who was told by the Israeli ambassador to the UK in April 1976 that Israel would follow events with an “open mind” (193-194). But this came about six weeks before the military intervention, and as stated, it is far from an agreement, which would imply that the Syrians were sure that Israel would not react militarily to their intervention.

However, Khalil’s assertion that the Syrian “intervention closely followed Israel’s conditions as expressed in public statements and private conversations with Kissinger” is not accurate. On 24 March 1976, Israeli officials passed a set of conditions to their American counterparts that included 1) a prohibition on the declared Syrian military entrance into Lebanon, 2) the deployment of forces of more than a brigade (including those already present), and 3) introduction of weapons along the coast or more than ten kilometers south of the Beirut-Damascus axis (176). Syria violated the second of these conditions by April and the first in June. What remained of the red lines by this point? It did not take a secret agreement to tell the Syrians that they needed to stay away from Israel’s northern border, and they had no reason to deploy weapons along the coast at this time. Why did the Syrians intervene, if they did not have Israeli assurances that their actions would not provoke a response? The best explanation for this is that they did so in spite of the risk, judging that losing control over events in Lebanon was a greater risk than an Israeli counter-intervention.

Kissinger’s legacy in Lebanon is particularly important because of its ramifications for the Arab-Israeli conflict, above all those that concerned the Palestinians. This is what Anziska and Khalil refer to in their comments about the possibility of a U.S. rapprochement with the Palestine Liberation Organization. Secret

U.S.-PLO contacts during the Nixon and Ford presidencies were revealed by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in September 1975 and have been discussed in numerous works on the U.S. and Middle East, as well as in a novel.⁵ In recent years, the declassification of relevant archival records and diligent investigations by researchers have resulted in a new wave of scholarship regarding the United States and the PLO that seeks to make sense of what diplomatic documents reveal was a potentially meaningful but ultimately unfulfilled set of connections.⁶

The declassification of some records of the U.S.-PLO contacts is an exciting challenge for diplomatic historians trying to reconstruct Kissinger's legacy in the Middle East. There has been a trend in recent years by diplomatic historians to reinterpret Kissinger's legacy as broadly anti-Palestinian, and indeed, in some ways it was.⁷ But as Kissinger's diplomacy in the broader Arab-Israeli conflict slowed down after two interim agreements between Egypt and Israel and one between Syria and Israel, he and other U.S. policymakers searched for ways to keep Arab states from undermining the U.S.-brokered agreements, and to prevent the possible re-eruption of a region-wide war. One such possibility was opening up U.S. contacts with the PLO, which had repeatedly been sending out feelers about the possibility of increased diplomatic contacts with the United States, and indeed was providing security for the US embassy in Beirut via the cover of the Lebanese Arab Army.

There is no question that the Palestinian issue was relevant to U.S. policy towards Lebanon. Indeed, at certain points, it was the central frame of reference through which U.S. officials viewed Lebanon. Khalil argues that my book "missed an opportunity to examine how the PLO's diplomatic initiatives from 1973-1976 may have contributed to Kissinger's decision-making on Lebanon." As Anziska notes, I examine in detail Kissinger's backchannel communications with the Palestinians in a forthcoming article in the *International History*

⁵ For instance, these contacts were discussed in Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 503, 626-629; David A. Korn, *Assassination in Khartoum* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993), 240-241; Saïd K. Aburish, *Arafat: From Defender to Dictator* (New York: Bloomsbury, 1998), 132. For the novel version, see David Ignatius, *Agents of Innocence* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

⁶ Some of these new works include the following: Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Making of the Post-Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); James Stocker, "Diplomacy as counter-revolution? The 'moderate states', the Fedayeen and State Department initiatives towards the Arab-Israeli conflict (1969–1970)," *Cold War History* 12:3 (2012); Simen Zernichow and Hilde Henriksen Waage, "The Palestine Option: Nixon, the National Security Council, and the Search for a New Policy, 1970," *Diplomatic History* 38:1 (2014); Kai Bird, *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames* (New York: Broadway Books, 2015); Osamah Khalil, "The Radical Crescent: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Lebanese Civil War, 1973-1978" *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27:3 (2016); James Stocker, "A Historical Inevitability?: Kissinger and US Contacts with the Palestinians (1973–76)," *International History Review* (forthcoming 2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2016.1189952>, and author's original manuscript at https://www.academia.edu/25658089/A_Historical_Inevitability_Henry_Kissinger_and_US_Contacts_with_the_Palestinians_1973-1976 *International History Review* accepted for publication forthcoming.

⁷ Two examples of this trend are Salim Yaqub, "The Weight of Conquest: Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Chamberlin's *The Global Offensive*, both of which characterize Kissinger as strongly anti-Palestinian.

*Review.*⁸ Still, *Spheres of Intervention* does in fact account for U.S.-PLO relations in the United States' Lebanon policy, including backchannel discussions and the role played by CIA operative Robert Ames (112-113, 123-124, 148). Khalil is correct that the Sinai II Agreement included a side agreement between the U.S. and Israel in which the U.S. promised not to negotiate with the Palestinians, but as I argue in the forthcoming article, it was loosely worded and basically restated U.S. policy as it stood. This side agreement in and of itself had virtually no impact on U.S. policy towards Lebanon.

Yet, the broader U.S.-Palestinian relationship did influence U.S. positions on the Lebanese conflict. It had long been obvious that Palestinian leaders there were split between those loyal to Arafat and seeking to be included in Kissinger's post-1973 negotiations, and rejectionists, who wanted the Arab countries to retain a unified front in order to impose their will on Israel. The Sinai II agreement contributed to this split, as rejectionists began to see evidence of international complicity in local events within Lebanon (153-154).

Could a U.S. initiative towards the PLO in some form or other have stopped the Lebanese Civil War? Maybe, maybe not. Certainly, a large constituency within the State Department wanted the United States to open up direct talks, openly or secretly, with the PLO on a variety of issues. With Kissinger in charge, however, this was unlikely to happen, even if (as I argue in the *IHR* article) he wanted to maintain the possibility of pursuing talks at a later time. In regards to Lebanon, U.S. officials such as then Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Joseph Sisco and mediator Dean Brown believed that opening talks with the Palestinians, even on the Lebanon issue alone, might encourage Arafat and his followers to moderate their behavior, thereby stemming the conflict (182). Ultimately, Kissinger decided not to pursue this, and encouraged the Syrian offensive against the PLO in Lebanon, even as he continued to discuss the idea of bringing the PLO into the dialogue on the Middle East with other State Department officials and Arab leaders.

In all of this discussion of U.S. maneuvering and backchannel contacts, is the local Lebanese perspective lost? In his thoughtful comments, Labelle suggests that it is, asserting that "...Lebanese agency, particularly that of Christian sectarians, is underplayed. Accordingly, Stocker's over-arching narrative inadvertently reifies Kissinger's 'flawed architecture:' international and regional agents of change overshadow Lebanese ones." Of course, the stated purpose of this book was to study the way in which international and regional actors influenced the internal politics of Lebanon, so it is almost inevitable that these perspectives would be privileged to some extent. However, readers will find that the views of Christian leaders and their surrogates are well represented in the narrative. If anything, other portions of Lebanese society are underplayed due to the difficulties of representing many different perspectives on the events of the time.⁹

Moreover, there are dangers in over-attributing agency to local groups, as is the case in Labelle's suggestion that "...Washington was equally a pawn in Lebanese strategies to internationalize the Civil War immediately following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967." Spheres of intervention are indeed, as Labelle states, a "relational process," but they are also permeated by power. Washington had it, at least to a certain extent, while Beirut

⁸ See Stocker, "A Historical Inevitability?"

⁹ At some point it becomes misleading to argue that there are as many perspectives on the Civil War as there are official Lebanese sects. For instance, there is no meaningful, separate Greek Catholic or Druze perspective on the war, and assuming that there is one just perpetuates the same tendency to reify existing sectarian differences where they did not exist.

and Jounieh did not. By early 1975, Christian Rightist leaders absolutely did not feel as though they had the support of Washington, Tel Aviv, or other capitals, and it is a stretch of the available evidence to suggest that they did.

The Civil War in Lebanon, today, is everywhere and nowhere.¹⁰ Pock-marked buildings stand next to brand-new construction, disorienting the viewer's sense of time and space. Public memorials to the conflict are virtually absent, but private interpretations fill the bookstores and coffeehouse conversations. There are no meaningful central archives holding state records; important documents are largely held in private or even foreign collections. Reconstructing the history and understanding the legacy of this conflict is a challenging task, but one that must be done if the country is to move forwards.

¹⁰ On historical memory of the war in Lebanon, see Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

**Comment by Osamah F. Khalil, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs,
Syracuse University**

The following additional comment from Prof. Khalil was published on 28 April 2017

In the spirit of the roundtable format and to encourage scholarly debate on this subject, which Professor Quandt and I both suggested, I wanted to offer a rebuttal to Professor James Stocker's response. Stocker objects to my assertion that "Syria's intervention closely followed Israel's conditions as expressed in public statements and private conversations with Kissinger." He references a 24 March 1976 memo discussed by Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz and U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that outlined Israel's position on a Syrian intervention. Stocker notes that by the time Syria invaded Lebanon in June, two of three points were not adhered to by Damascus. He asks, "What remained of the red line by this point? It did not take a secret agreement to tell the Syrians that they needed to stay away from Israel's northern border, and they had no reason to deploy weapons along the coast at this time."

If it was that simple, then why did Israel continue negotiating with Syria through Jordan and the United States? Why did Israeli officials continue making public statements regarding a "red line"? Moreover, the 24 March meeting was not the only or last indication of Israel's so-called red line. As detailed by Yair Evron, the geographical limitation was the most important aspect. In particular, Israel sought to prohibit Syrian military operations south of Lebanon's Litani river. This was reflected in public and private statements by Israeli officials.¹ It was Syria's observance of the Litani river as the red line that I was referring to in my review and I stand by my statement that the Syrian intervention closely followed public statements by Israeli officials and private messages to Kissinger.

On June 1, as Syrian forces intervened in Lebanon, Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon held a press conference. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv reported that Allon stated, "Syrian and the other parties concerned were aware of Israel's concept of a 'Red Line' limiting the extent of acceptable Syrian intervention. Israel's main concern was its own national interest, security and defence, and it would reserve the right to take all necessary measures to protect these interests."² Although Allon's statement is not referenced in *Spheres of Intervention*, Stocker does discuss a press conference the following day by Israeli Defense Minister Shimon Peres, which was "a partial reiteration of the Red Line principles."³

What can we make of these public statements by Israeli officials? Was the "red line" mere bluster? Were Israel's demands more flexible than they originally appeared? Or were Israeli officials signaling to Damascus through public statements in lieu of an actual agreement? Or perhaps the statements were meant to reassure a domestic audience about Syria's actions while also warning Damascus and Washington? Without the benefit of the Israeli archives, we cannot be certain. However, it is unlikely that Israeli officials would have left this to

¹ Yair Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syrian Deterrence Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 46-48, 55, 75; Fawaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* Second Edition (New York: Pluto Press): 203.

² Tel Aviv to London, "Mr. Allon's Press Conference of 1 June," 2 June 1976, UK FCO 93/882.

³ James Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention: US Foreign Policy and the Collapse of Lebanon, 1967-1976* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016): 196-197.

chance. And contrary to Stocker's claim, it would be even more improbable that Hafiz al-Assad would intervene in Lebanon without some indication that Israel would not react. As Stocker demonstrates, discussions and negotiations between Israel and Syria continued through the spring brokered by Washington and Amman. However, our insights into those discussions are incomplete as key documents are either not declassified or are not yet available (and some may never be accessible to researchers). We do know some aspects of what did and *did not* transpire, however.

As I and other scholars have noted, and Professor Stocker did not challenge, "Ultimately, neither the United States nor Israel objected to Syria's invasion."⁴ In addition, Syrian forces did not venture south of the Litani river, even though there were a significant number of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) forces based there. In part, this may have had to do with how poorly the Syrian army fared against the PLO north of the river, especially in the city of Sidon.

Syria's military performance was not the only factor, however, as a November 1976 meeting in Washington between Ambassador Dinitz and Secretary of State Kissinger revealed. With a cease-fire in Lebanon in place, Dinitz and Kissinger discussed a scheduled meeting between U.S. Ambassador to Israel Malcom Toon and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on the subject of southern Lebanon. Syrian forces proposed advancing south of the Litani river to the city of Tyre with the intent of disarming PLO *fedayeen* and preventing future raids into northern Israel. When Dinitz asked Kissinger how Ambassador Toon would explain the issue to Prime Minister Rabin, Kissinger stated, "Toon will say: On the one hand you told the Syrians they are responsible for what happens in Southern Lebanon but on the other hand you don't let them enter Southern Lebanon."⁵

The November 23 meeting partially answers Professor Stocker's question about "what remained of the red line" and what Syria needed to understand in relation to Israel's northern border. Neither Tyre nor the Litani river are situated directly on the border with Israel. As noted in *Spheres of Intervention*, Rabin and the Israeli cabinet opposed Syria's proposed move south and Damascus complied.⁶ Therefore, it is evident that at a minimum there was an *understanding* between Israel and Syria that Washington was aware of and that the parties revisited periodically and in response to events.⁷ It is also clear from the discussion that Syria believed it needed Israel's approval before deploying forces into southern Lebanon. Although the "red line" was not a *formal* agreement, it was not a "red herring" or a "myth" either. A more accurate assessment would be that it was a *tacit* agreement or understanding between a weaker party (i.e., Syria) hoping to avoid a direct

⁴ See Osamah F. Khalil, "The Radical Crescent: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Lebanese Civil War, 1973-1978," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27:3 (September 2016): 496-522; David M. Wight, "Kissinger's Levantine Dilemma: The Ford Administration and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon," *Diplomatic History*, 37/1 (2013), 144-77; and Naomi Joy Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975-1976 Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, 23 November 1976, *Digital National Security Archive, The Kissinger Transcripts, 1969-1977*. During the meeting Dinitz confirmed that Tyre was located south of the Litani.

⁶ Stocker, 217-218.

⁷ For example, see Kissinger and Dinitz Telephone Conversation, 6 December 1976, *Digital National Security Archive, The Kissinger Telephone Conversations, 1969-1977*.

confrontation with the stronger force (i.e., Israel) while attempting to address a shared problem (i.e., the PLO in Lebanon). As I suggested in my review, *Spheres of Intervention* would have benefited from a more cautious discussion of this issue and one that was more consistent with Stocker's approach through most of the book.

Stocker asserts that the "best explanation" for Syria's intervention without Israeli assurances of a response was "that they did so in spite of the risk, judging that losing control over events in Lebanon was a greater risk than an Israeli counter-intervention." However, the over four and half decades of rule by the Assad family has hardly been characterized by risk-taking. Even Assad's most ambitious endeavor, the October 1973 War, was limited by his conservative approach and almost ended in disaster. Nor did it result in Syria regaining the Golan Heights through subsequent negotiations. After 1973, Assad was even more reticent to engage the Israelis directly, ever cognizant of the threat to his military and his rule. As Syria's 1976 intervention in Lebanon faltered, Kissinger and Assad were concerned about the implications for his regime.⁸ Six years later, Israeli forces besieged Beirut and pummeled the city. With Syria's air defenses destroyed, Assad and his army were either unwilling or unable to intervene and watched as Palestinian and Lebanese civilian casualties mounted. After the PLO's withdrawal from Beirut and Israel's redeployment south, Syrian military and intelligence services actively targeted the remaining PLO forces and officials in Lebanon directly and indirectly through Lebanese militias and breakaway PLO factions tied to Damascus. Indeed, if anything characterizes the rule of the Assad regime – Hafiz and Bashar –it is that military action is preferred when the targets are predominantly civilians and the potential for an embarrassing defeat is limited. It is therefore doubtful that Assad would have taken the risk of intervention without some assurances – and Israel's public statements reflected this dynamic.

Stocker states that "Khalil seems to be suggesting that it is more likely that Syrian leaders are simply lying, and that some arrangement was in fact made with Israel. This is not impossible, as I contend in the book." Based on the available but fragmented evidence, the Assad regime was less than truthful about its coordination with Israel and the United States prior to, during, and after its intervention in Lebanon. It should go without saying that in the annals of diplomatic history it is hardly unusual for government officials to lie publicly or privately. Nor is this limited to autocratic rulers or weak state actors. I have documented Kissinger's prevarications related to Syria's intervention in Lebanon as well as U.S.-PLO relations. I have also detailed how PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat offered concessions to Israel and the United States privately, and then denied them publicly.⁹ Moreover, one need only visit the twin museums in Cairo and Damascus celebrating the "victory" of the October 1973 War for the persistence of official fabrications.

Despite this minor disagreement, I remain an admirer of Professor Stocker and *Spheres of Intervention* and I look forward to reading more from this impressive scholar.

⁸ See Khalil, "The Radical Crescent," 506-511.

⁹ Ibid.