



Peter Hahn

Peter Hahn
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"Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy Toward the Arab Israeli Conflict, 1945- 1961"

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Peter L. Hahn, Professor of History at Ohio State and a Mershon Center Research Fellow, recently published *Caught in the Middle East : U.S. Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961* (UNC Press, 2004).

Hahn explained that immediately after the end of World War II politicians implemented policies that influence current U.S. policy, and by looking at this period, it is possible to understand the "what and why" of Washington's actions in Israel today. He explained that the decisions made in the mid-twentieth century illustrate how the United States was "caught" in the middle of the Arab-Israeli conflict, both because it could not extract itself from involvement in the region and because it was caught between competing Israeli and Palestinian interests.

Hahn said that this resulted from policies the United States began after World War II. Prior to the war, British and French leaders took the initiative in making policy in the Middle East . Eventually, however, Washington recognized that the region was important for U.S. strategic and economic interests, and began actively pursuing its own policies. Eventually, the United States took the lead in defending Western interests in the region.

Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower ultimately presided over policies that made peace between Israel and Palestine extremely unlikely. During the Cold War, and especially between 1945 and 1961, Hahn explained that U.S. fears about Communism spreading in the Middle East superceded any interest in working toward peace in the region. When confronted with options of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Hahn said Washington prioritized its own strategic security stronghold over lasting peace. He contended that those decisions jeopardized Washington 's ability to participate in peace negotiations in the 21 st century.

The book analyzes the policies of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Hahn said that the approaches taken by the two sides were extremely different—Truman was unsteady in foreign affairs and distracted by events elsewhere, so his policies in the region were very reactionary; Eisenhower had wealth of international experience and took a proactive stance on the Middle East—but that both made U.S. interests in fighting the spread of Communism a priority over lasting peace in the region.

In the book, Hahn also explores the oft-cited "special" relationship between Israel and the United States . He said that that archival research both supports and refutes the claims that Washington is exceptional in its dealings with Tel Aviv, and that there have historically been equal parts sympathy and acrimony among members of Washington 's elite.

He said that these conflicting attitudes resulted in what he called the "Firmness Dilemma," which led the United States to treat Israel with a "firm hand," expecting the state to comply with Washington 's decisions. In reality, this often resulted in a kind of rebellion, by Israel and those sympathetic to its causes. Eventually, Hahn said, such people began to circumvent the State Department and Department of Defense, which were thought to be less friendly to Israel, since it was believed that the best way to ensure policies that would benefit that state were best formed in the Oval Office.

Hahn's book traces the history of the U.S. relationship with Israel and looks at the way diplomacy in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations continue to impact Washington 's role in the

Middle East . He said that because they both prioritized security and stability for the United States during the Cold War at the expense of peace in the region, Washington inherited an agenda that leaves political, security, and economic marks on contemporary politics throughout the Middle East. --Julie
Rojewski

Peter Hahn (Ph.D, Vanderbilt) is associate professor of history. He specializes in United States diplomatic history in the Middle East since 1940. He has won research grants from the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Truman Library Institute, the John F. Kennedy Library, the Lyndon Johnson Foundation, the Eisenhower World Affairs Institute, the Office of United States Air Force History, and the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

Prof. Hahn's publications include *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (1991), and *Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World Since 1945* (2001), as well as essays in *Diplomatic History*, *Reviews in American History*, *International History Review*, and other journals and books. He is currently the associate editor of *Diplomatic History* and Executive Director of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Prof. Hahn recently published *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961* (UNC Press, 2004).
