

PRO-ARAB LOBBYING

The Arab Lobby and US Foreign Policy: The Two-State Solution, by Khalil Marrar. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. xii + 149 pages. Appendices to p. 164. Notes to p. 220. Bibliography to p. 254. Index to p. 269. \$140.00 cloth; \$39.95 paper.

Reviewed by Steven Salaita

Khalil Marrar's *The Arab Lobby and US Foreign Policy: The Two-State Solution* is a provocative and comprehensive monograph that surveys and analyzes the role of Arab and Arab American activist and political organizations—together comprising what Marrar calls the “pro-Arab lobby”—in the policy discourses of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Marrar is concerned in particular with the now-widespread one-state/two-state debate and its influence on both pro-Arab and pro-Israel lobbying efforts. He asks, “[W]hy has the US shifted away from an ‘Israel only’ position toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to supporting an ‘Israel and Palestine’ formula for peace?” (p. 3)

Marrar, a political scientist at DePaul University, endeavors to shift focus from intense exploration of the pro-Israel lobby onto activity undertaken on behalf of Arab interests. He suggests that “[w]hile public opinion and pro-Israel pressure groups have been thoroughly discussed in the literature, the often-dismissed pro-Arab lobby remains worthy of a great deal of foreign policy analysis” (p. 4). Marrar largely relies on extensive polling data and on a thorough survey of policy papers and extant scholarship. The range of his research is impressive. Its presentation is clear and economical. He discusses the major Arab American lobbying organizations, including the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Arab American Institute, and the American Task Force on Palestine,

along with their main pro-Israel counterpart, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. This book is highly recommended for those interested in a quantitative analysis of public opinion and organized activism in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Of particular interest is Marrar's argument about the codification of the two-state solution among pro-Israel lobbyists. He notes that “while the pro-Israel lobby never recognized the national rights of the Palestinians, its interest in maintaining a democracy exclusively for Jews in the Middle East has meant that it had to countenance the possibility of an Arab political establishment on the West Bank and Gaza” (p. 4). As Marrar points out, the maintenance of a Jewish-only democracy in Palestine is an important motivator of advocates of a one-state solution, who argue that ethnocentric societies cannot be properly democratic or ethical. Marrar assesses this irony with considerable vigor and insight.

Marrar does not editorialize about or proffer explicit opinion of the one-state/two-state debate. Instead, he presents and analyzes various points of view, commenting on their viability based on his reading of what might be politically realistic. This approach is sound but generally elides many of the ethical questions of concern in the debate. It is difficult to tell exactly where Marrar stands on the one-state/two-state debate; he acknowledges strengths and weaknesses of both proposals without staking out a distinct position. As a result, readers are able to explore for themselves which ideas and proposals seem most feasible based on the various factors Marrar introduces and discusses. More easily comprehended is Marrar's research into the role of the debate in Arab American lobbying efforts. To this end, he presents numerous interviews with and communiqués from important players in those efforts. These form one of the most fascinating and provocative aspects of the book.

It is inevitable that a book on the Israel-Palestine conflict will evoke disagreement or even hostility. It is difficult to imagine that *The Arab Lobby* would evoke hostility, for it is not in the least polemical or methodologically radical. It could conceivably evoke disagreement, however. While I found nothing of note in the book with which I would heartily disagree, I did find myself questioning Marrar's reliance on

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polling data, which are notoriously unreliable. To be fair, Marrar does take this unreliability into account, but it would have been more interesting had he weighed them against other types of evidence. Many people, for instance, will say they support a two-state solution, but that support often exists in the abstract. Or, once the actual work of implementing a viable Palestinian state needs to be done, a sort of resistance unforeseen by opinion polls arises. Also, Marrar might have spent more time defining the complexities of the term "pro-Arab lobby." His deployment of that term develops a specific logic in the context of his argument, but a discourse analysis would have made that logic more convincing. In the book, "pro-Arab lobby" generally refers to organizations led by Arab Americans whose focus in part is on ending the Israeli occupation. Finally, while Marrar discusses some of the funding sources of the pro-Arab lobby, it would have been fascinating had he produced a detailed accounting of those sources and their political interests.

These are merely the normal quibbles with a provocative work of scholarship. In total, *The Arab Lobby* is strong and engaging. It would be appropriate for classroom use and is a welcome intervention in a debate that, as Marrar observes, has dramatically altered the discursive and policy frameworks of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Most important, Marrar introduces into scholarly conversation the notion of a "pro-Arab lobby," one that other scholars will surely take up, if we are lucky with the same standard of excellence Marrar has introduced.