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The CIA draft on "Israeli Thinking on a Peace Settlement with the Arabs" is a competent but unexciting piece of work. Anyone who has followed Israeli politics with some care will find no surprises in this study. Having just read the paper, I cannot now think of anything I learned in it, and I am far from being an expert on Israel.

What is most disappointing about the paper is its cautious tone, only stating what is pretty obvious and accords with conventional wisdom. Perhaps it is asking too much of an analyst, but I would like to see a bit more speculation and construction of some alternative courses of action that the Israelis might take. For example, as the Israeli election campaign gets underway, what can we expect? Will the obvious leaders draw together and minimize their differences, or will the issue of a peace settlement become a divisive one? Is the election and the preceding campaign likely to reduce the chances of responsiveness to a US initiative, or would some candidate profit by showing flexibility and responsiveness to a reasonable US proposal?

A further reservation is whether the stated hardline Israeli positions are all that firm. I once read over the Israeli public statements made between November 1956 and spring 1957. They were as adamant and unyielding about never withdrawing from Sinai as anything I see today. Rather than assuming that Israeli positions are set in concrete and we can do nothing to change that, I would like to see some speculation on what conditions might lead some Israeli leaders--which ones?--toward minimalist positions. For example, would Arab agreement to direct negotiations change anything; what about concrete Arab statements and actions that reduce the sense of threat to Israel; finally, what response to various kinds of US actions could we expect? Admittedly, this is beyond the scope of the researcher, but ultimately these are the questions we want to be able to answer. The paper as it now stands does not offer much help.

In general, the analyst should be encouraged to make less use of such shorthand terms as "the Arabs," "Tel Aviv believes," and so forth. Do Israeli views of different Arabs show much variance? Jordan, Syria and Egypt are not viewed in identical terms by "Tel Aviv," to say nothing of individuals in the Israeli government. For example, I have the impression that Dayan may be flexible on the terms of a settlement with Egypt, but difficult on the Jordan front. Allon, Sapir and Golda may be just the opposite. Again, the paper does not go far enough in exploring these differences. In brief, as a research paper this deserves about a B+, and as a policy guidance paper considerably less.

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