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Charles D. Freilich. *Zion's Dilemmas: How Israel Makes National Security Policy*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013. 336 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-5104-1.

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Charles D. Freilich's *Zion's Dilemmas* advances a compelling critique of the Israeli government's decision-making process (DMP) in national security affairs and suggests some useful avenues of potential improvement. Freilich, who is a former Israeli deputy national security advisor and is currently a senior fellow at the Belfer Center at Harvard's Kennedy School, describes the book as "a work of love, embedded in a lifelong commitment to Zionism." But the measure of Freilich's (tough) love is not to tell Israelis what they would like to hear, but to express the hard truth that Israelis need to hear before it is too late. His tone is therefore, in his own words, "cold, unforgiving, and 'objective,'" and the reforms he recommends are substantial (p. ix). For example, he recommends far-reaching structural reforms of Israel's proportional representation electoral system.

One obvious criticism that could be leveled at Freilich's book is that none of this—neither the problems that he identifies with Israel's national security DMP nor the reforms he champions—is entirely new, as he himself acknowledges. The profound problems for policy formulation arising from the need to form multiparty coalitions, for example, are a frequent refrain among observers of Israeli politics. Freilich also recognizes that once the case is laid out systematically, some of the problems that he initially postulates (such as the continual leaking of high-level deliberations) appear on his own analysis to be less persistent than has often been assumed. Finally, there is also some room for quibbles related to the testing of his claims concerning the deficiency of the Israeli DMP, his assessment of the results of those tests, and the realism of some of the reforms that he proposes to address the problems he identifies (as will

each be described below).

Yet there is also an important sense in which such criticisms miss the point. The book's key contribution is to lay out systematically the case for the reform of Israel's national security DMP, to test its key claims against a substantial body of evidence, to see what really withstands critical scrutiny, and to assess which reform proposals (if any) this analysis strongly supports. This is an invaluable gift not only to Israel but also to scholars, commentators, and the general public interested in its future, or in its formulation of policy over the last sixty odd years. In this context, if it gives rise to debate over, for example, how firmly some particular problem in the Israeli DMP is demonstrated and how much priority its mitigation should be given, it will in fact have done its job—beginning an informed, critical discussion of where the most serious challenges to Israeli security policy lie and how they can best be addressed. If it accomplishes this, and I believe it does, then it constitutes a major contribution.

Freilich's book follows a clear, rational structure that suits its purpose. It opens with an overview of how Israel currently formulates its national security policy and some of its recent failures, like the 2006 war in Lebanon. Freilich observes that Israel "has not unequivocally won a major military confrontation since 1967 and has failed to achieve its objectives in most of the major diplomatic efforts it has undertaken as well" (p. 2). He then identifies five pathologies that have long characterized its national security DMP but in recent years have grown worse. He argues that these pathologies result, in particular, from Israel's peculiar system of proportional rep-

resentation and the weak planning and decision-making capabilities of its primary civilian national security organs (i.e., the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense and the National Security Council). The five pathologies are the largely reactive nature of the national security DMP; its politicization, especially at the cabinet level; the relative statutory weakness of the prime minister in relation to other ministers and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officials; the informal character of the DMP, in particular the absence of institutional checks and balances and of a culture of consultation; and the unusual influence of the IDF, which clearly has the most highly developed planning capabilities. Next Freilich tests these purported pathologies against seven case studies of Israeli policy formation, specifically peacemaking with Egypt, 1977-79; the effort to develop the Lavi aircraft, 1980-87; the invasion of Lebanon in 1982; the unilateral withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000; the Camp David II negotiations with the Palestinians, 1999-2000; the disengagement from Gaza in 2005; and the Second Lebanon War in 2006. Finally, having confirmed the presence and importance of all of the pathologies (save for a subcategory of the third involving the harmful impact of leaks), he briefly introduces and assesses some reforms that might help to overcome the five pathologies, or at least moderate them, so that Israel could better address the many challenges that it confronts today. First and foremost, Freilich recommends the strengthening and rebalancing of civilian national security organs, primarily the strengthening of the Israeli National Security Council, and secondarily of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense and particularly their strategic planning capabilities. He also insists that “reform of the PR [proportional representation] system remains essential,” and suggests several avenues of substantial reform (p. 247).

This framework invites several lines of criticism beyond the “old hat” charge discussed above. First, the pathologies seem somewhat arbitrarily chosen and non-exhaustive, so that even if they can be shown to exist, it remains unclear that these are the most urgent problems and therefore warrant priority now. Second, Freilich does not provide a clear criteria for the selection of his case studies—what he offers is a variety of loose considerations that indicate why these are not unreasonable cases to consider—and he therefore leaves himself open to charges that he may have cherry-picked these cases because they happen to validate his pathologies. Third, I have some doubts that the case studies are in general as supportive of his pathologies, or at least some of them,

as he seems to think. For example, one component of his third pathology—that Israeli national security decision making occurs in a context of “semi-organized anarchy” (pp. 43, 226)—is that the “premier is only partially in charge” (p. 43). Tested in the seven case studies on a scale of “high,” “medium,” or “low” confirmation or insufficient data (ID), one case is ranked as “ID,” three as “low,” two as “moderate,” and only one as “high” (p. 226). Yet Freilich takes this as an at least moderate verification of his hypothesis. Fourth, at times Freilich’s assessment of the degree of verification of his pathologies provided by specific case studies may be a little overgenerous. For instance, in the case of the unilateral withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000, Freilich notes in one paragraph that “despite the IDF’s best efforts the cabinet voted for withdrawal unanimously,” but in the next insists that his fifth pathology, the “primacy of the defense establishment,” was “moderately manifested” (p. 152). In this case, “low” might be a more accurate rating. Finally, in regard to his recommendations, plausible concerns can be raised over whether they are realistic.

Freilich’s recommendations are primarily directed to creating a more institutionalized deliberative environment for the national security DMP in which the prime minister and his circle of senior security officials will be confronted by a range of options prepared by policy planning staff. Yet Freilich himself notes the tendency of Israeli prime ministers to avoid formal presentations of alternatives to their preferred policies, particularly in authoritative deliberative forums that might choose to endorse such alternatives, not only in order to protect their preferences but also to maintain political flexibility moving forward. A good illustration of these tendencies is the former prime minister’s, Ariel Sharon, DMP on unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. This suggests that prime ministers are likely to resist, or seek to circumvent, the kinds of changes that Freilich recommends and with some reason: operating in the politically fractionalized domestic political system and confronted with the extraordinary challenges of the external environment, Israeli leaders need to protect their already limited control of national security policy. This need will be threatened by formalizing a more inclusive national security DMP. This suggests in turn substantial practical obstacles to the implementation of Freilich’s recommendations as well as some significant political costs that would be entailed. Freilich recognizes these difficulties to some degree, arguing for example that the free-wheeling, improvisational policy-making of prime ministers may have sometimes benefited Israel in the past, but is less appropriate to an in-

creasingly complex, globalized policy environment. But while this may be true, it is far from self-evident, and it could equally be argued that the networked complexity of today's global policy environment puts a premium on rapid, flexible adaptation and centrality of decision making. At any rate, the book would have been further enriched by a deeper examination of these key assumptions, particularly in relation to Israel's peculiar place in contemporary international politics.

In the final analysis, however, most of these criticisms add up to little more than quibbles over how Freilich realized his important and largely successful project. They should not overshadow the fact that the overall impact of the analysis is to firmly establish some key difficulties in Israel's national security DMP, and to offer some clearly reasoned and evocative recommendations to address them. Most important, in establishing, perhaps for the first time, a richly detailed and substantive framework for examining Israel's national security DMP, *Zion's Dilemmas* succeeds in creating a framework within which such critical issues can be productively discussed.

Freilich's book will be of interest to experts and general readers of the Middle East and security policy. It is not, however, a uniformly easy read, despite being clearly written and relatively short at 257 pages of text (plus another 50 pages of supporting materials). The first two chapters in particular are a little dry and may tend to put off a general reader. But they establish a basic familiarity with national security structures, which importantly informs the next seven historical chapters. They are also enlivened by some wonderfully vivid illustrations. For example, one characteristic Israeli challenge to sound decision making is the hostility that frequently arises in cabinets that are based on the coalition of many parties, and whose ministers are therefore often one another's principal rivals. Freilich illustrates the resulting situation by quoting a remark made by an observer of

Ehud Barak and his cabinet: "Barak's attitude to his cabinet could be divided into three: those ministers he did not respect, those he could not stand, and those who fell into both categories" (p. 42).

But the real strength of *Zion's Dilemmas* is the case studies. Each of the episodes is distinctive and interesting. Some of them, like Camp David I (the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty) had major international significance and will be broadly familiar to a general reader. Others, such as the story of the Lavi combat aircraft, are of narrower significance even to Israelis and may be only vaguely familiar even to experts on the region. But each of them presents an engaging and revealing narrative embroidered with the testimony of many insiders interviewed by Freilich. In each case, Freilich begins with a sparse sketch of the strategic setting of events and then separately examines the degree to which each of his pathologies is manifested in the unfolding Israeli DMP. The effect is like placing one transparency showing a few key details over another until gradually a complete, textured picture begins to emerge. In particular, one begins to see how the various pathologies reinforce one another and present increasingly complex challenges to leaders seeking to advance Israeli security. The cumulative effect is deeply troubling, not only for those concerned strictly with Israeli security but also for anyone concerned with the future of this volatile region, for the more dysfunctional is Israel's national security DMP, the more it presents a danger to the region's stability.

General readers will find the case studies both fascinating and informative, and even experts will, I suspect, learn new details and make connections that they had not formerly perceived. And whether they are fully persuaded of Freilich's recommendations or not, they are likely to agree that he draws attention to a crucial issue for Israel and the Middle East, and provides a systematic, rigorous, and balanced framework from which to begin to explore it. For that he is to be heartily congratulated.

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