New and hitherto unknown material

The contents of this book are in large part totally new. For example, the author presents testimonies that were given to the members of UNSCOP surreptitiously and informally by tracking them down among the documents of the UNSCOP archives in New York. In another example, he references interviews and meetings with several Palestinian personalities who officially boycotted the Committee. There is also documentation of informal encounters that, according to the book, helped the Committee members to make up their minds.

The book unpacks the internal discussions of the Committee and all of its investigations on the basis of primary documents from multiple archives. To the best of my knowledge, neither the Committee’s internal discussions nor its investigations appear in any other published work. The author reveals in the internal discussions, for example, that some members of the Committee intended to recommend partitioning the country such that a state for the Jews would be established in part of it and the rest would be annexed to Transjordan. Ultimately, the Committee preferred to recommend partitioning the country into two sovereign and independent states and to suppress the views of those who thought it better not to establish an Arab state. This stance is not known and is a novelty of the current study.

Familiar material from a new angle

The arrival of the illegal immigrants’ vessel *Exodus* and the banishment of its passengers to Germany have received quite a bit of attention in research, including the question of whether and to what extent the affair influenced the Committee members’ recommendation to establish a Jewish state. The current study, however, contemplates this familiar episode from a special angle. The author describes the affair on the basis of two hitherto obscure sources: the personal papers of the UNSCOP members and the Committee’s internal debate. Some members saw the *Exodus* drop anchor at Haifa and also conversed with British officers who were involved in seizing the ship and the Jews aboard it.

Another familiar affair that this book illuminates from a new and unfamiliar perspective is the involvement of UNSCOP in the affair of the Irgun’s abduction of the British sergeants.

The period covered in the book—the sunset of the British Mandate for Palestine—has been probed in many studies. However, the angle presented here—the UN investigative committee and the unique sources on which the book is based: UN documents and the committee members’ personal papers—bask the period in question in new and unfamiliar light.

1. The answer is an unequivocal yes. Here is an important contribution of a critical affair in the process that led the UN to adopt the partition resolution (to which, in many respects, one may trace the establishment of the State of Israel). Just the same, this episode had not been researched on the scale that it deserves—until now.
2. It relates mainly to Middle East studies, and secondarily to international relations, political science, Israel studies, Jewish history, the Holocaust, and conflict resolution.
3. The Israel-Arab conflict always stirs keen interest. Furthermore, the media have had much to say about November 29 in recent years because the Palestinians have turned this date (the anniversary of the adoption of the partition plan in 1947) into an occasion that the UN marks as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. For this reason, interest in the partition plan has lost none of its intensity over time and may even have gained more. It is also noteworthy that Trump’s “Deal of the Century,” which included a new partition resolution, gave attention to partition another boost.

Pursuant to the Abraham Accords and Israel’s normalization with several Arab states, interest in the matter has grown. The underlying settlement from 1947 is a familiar point of reference that surfaces in the context of any political settlement of the Israel–Arab conflict.

The representatives of some of the countries are very well known in their countries. Examples are the Canadian representative, Ivan Rand (a Supreme Court justice at the time) and his Swedish counterpart, to name only two. Also, the story of some countries’ support of partition—these are very important stories in several countries that sent representatives to UNSCOP, such as Uruguay, Guatemala, Canada, and Sweden. The partition story is very well known there but the road that led to partition (UNSCOP) is less familiar or altogether unknown.

The book will also be of interest to readers in Britain. It mentions many British stakeholders, such as Foreign Secretary Bevin, Alan Cunningham (the last High Commissioner), and others. The United States is also mentioned quite a bit in the book, as is the Soviet Union. The activity of these two superpowers is described on the basis of documents from their archives. Their contribution to the partition resolution was dramatic and their role in the affair, as described in the book, is unfamiliar and, accordingly, should generate interest.

5. Courses on the Israel-Arab conflict and the UN, conflict resolution, Jewish history, Israel studies, and Holocaust studies (the last-mentioned due to the matter of displaced persons and illegal immigration to Mandate Palestine).

6. I find the author’s concept and methodology highly useful for examining the affair. The book presents a chronological survey of the events (as one would expect). I wish, however, to make favorable note of the author’s methodological goal of describing the doings of UNSCOP en bloc as well as those of each of its representatives as individuals. To give each of them separate treatment, the author tracked down the personal papers of most of them and, for this reason, is able to estimate where they really stood. The book also pauses in several places to subject each representative to individualized critique. This interesting methodological innovation is eminently suitable for the examination of a body such as UNSCOP.

9. The book will be a relevant source for historians for many years to come. As I wrote in response to Question 3 above, although the book takes up a historical matter, the topic investigated still resonates on the international agenda.

10. The author has already made an international name for himself as a specialist on the onset of UN involvement in the Israel/Palestine conflict. His previous book, which you published, along with his published articles in Hebrew and English, leave no doubt about his abilities and his suitability to write the book proposed here.

11. The book draws on a highly impressive bevy of primary sources, some from archives that are considered rare in this field, e.g., those in Sweden, India, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Australia, and Canada. The author’s serious effort to add these sources to those familiar in our discipline—British, American, and Zionist documents—is noteworthy.

12. The book is written on a high level and is well tailored to the market.

13. The order of presentation, the contents, and the sources are, in my judgment, good and satisfactory. The order is logical and the manner of reference is as global as the topic permits.

14. Chapter 10—“Eleven Committees of One”: The Personal Views of UNSCOP’s Members”—is quite unique and reveals an unfamiliar dimension of the topic. The chapter that follows, devoted to the Great Powers, is also strong. Here the author shows that in contrast to what one would expect—that the powers would influence UNSCOP—the historical process headed in the opposite direction: It was UNSCOP that influenced them and prompted them to support partition.

15. There is no such chapter.

16. The only book that is close to the proposed study, in my opinion, is that of Yehoshua Freundlich, *From Destruction to Resurrection: Zionist Policy from the End of the Second World War to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1994, Hebrew only). It comes with a chapter that deals with UNSCOP and focuses on Zionist policy vis-à-vis the Committee—only one chapter in the book. Freundlich does not call on even a small fraction of Ben-Dror’s sources and does not purport to cover the affair in the scope and the depth of the proposed work. In sum, to the best of my knowledge, the proposed book has no rivals.

17. I replied in my previous response.

20. Publishing this book is a matter of immense importance. Bringing it out in English and sharing it with an international readership will add a balanced, authoritative, and well documented academic basis to a topic that has attracted much attention in the popular discourse, providing a perspective on one of those affairs in which the international community engineered a meaningful change by contemplating it from all possible angles.