**Book Review:**

Ofir Winter

**Peace in the Name of Allah: Islamic Discourses on Treaties with Israel**

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Winter’s book is a product of a solid and important research on the Islamic Arab discourses for and against peace agreements between three Arab states – Egypt, Jordan and the UAE – with Israel. The study is based on a wide range of sources, including speeches and interviews with key figures, religious rulings and treatises, press articles, propaganda publications, sermons, religious conferences, school textbooks, poems, and even postage stamps, but its major source is the text production of Islamic sages by fatwas, media articles or speeches.

The book consists of an introduction and three chapters. In the Introduction the author discusses the meaning of the terms “jihad” and “peace” in early Islamic sources juxtaposing them with contemporary Islamic jurisprudential literature. It explains the distinction between state Islam, with its pragmatic exegetic approaches to peace with Israel, and the radical Islamist opposition forces—which compete for the right to interpret the sacred texts and Islamic traditions and to determine their implications in this context.

The three chapters are devoted to an analysis of the Islamic debates between opponents and proponents of peace with Israel in each of the three countries: Egypt (Chapter One) Jordan (Chapter Two) and the United Arab Emirates – UAE (Chapter Three).

It begins with the religious dimension of Egypt’s pioneering peace agreement with Israel. It analyses the Islamist opposition to the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace agreement in contrast to the arguments used by the Egyptian regime in its advocacy for the agreement.

The second and third chapters do the same with regards to Jordan and the UAE. The more current and new contribution to the literature is the chapter on the UAE that examines the polemic over the Islamic legitimacy of the Abraham Accords between the UAE and Israel. It explores the role of peace with Israel in Abu Dhabi’s overall efforts to cultivate a local ethos of moderate Islam while weakening Islamist forces at home and abroad and burnishing its international image.

The case on Egypt was researched years ago by the reviewer. Winter’s study follows in the same analytical path, and by doing so he is adding an important chunk of discourses that were not included in previous studies. However he is missing another important material on the topic which is an analysis of Islamic discourses in Egypt that preceded the 1979 peace treaty, that is, the 1950s, 1960 and early 1970s fatwas of al-Azhar and Sheikh Hasan Ma`mun who established the foundations of the interpreting Islamic grounds for and against peace with Israel. One would also expect the author to analyze texts regarding the assassination of the President of Egypt – Anwar al-Sadat – and particularly the pamphlet named The Neglected Duty. This text contains the radical Islamic opposition to the peace with Israel charging al-Sadat for neglecting his duty of Jihad – the holy war.

Among Winter’s contributions to the research literature is his method of writing. He analyses the texts in a consistent mode interpreting one by one each of the arguments expressed in every text. Since the corpus of sources is wide his analysis is sounder than previous studies.

In the chapter on Jordan Winter maintains that the regime did not issue texts or fatwas written by high ranking sages. Instead, the palace issued its stance regarding Jerusalem. Jordan called to de-politicize the issue of Jerusalem and transform the city from an exclusive emblem of a single religion into a shared and inclusive emblem of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and distinguishing between “political sovereignty” and “holy sovereignty” in Jerusalem by initiating a dialogue among representatives of the three Abrahamic faiths.

Peace between Israel and the UAE is relatively new and therefor the third chapter analyzing the religious discourse of the opponents and proponents of peace with Israel is an important contribution to the body of knowledge. The UAE sage Abdallah bin Bayyah issued a fatwa supporting the agreement using the same Islamic legal arguments such as those who were used before in Egypt and Jordan, but with one important innovation: underlying a connection between the Islamic principle of peace and the Emirati national ethos of tolerance adding that the agreement corresponds with the Islamic principle of *maslaha* (the public good of the Muslims) because it puts a stop to Israel’s plans to annex Palestinian territories in the West Bank and opened new opportunities for Muslim pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The opponents were numerous sages of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaeadawi’s lead International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) who issued a fatwa in which the major religious-based argument was that it is a sin to sign a permanent peace agreement and to normalize relations with Israel as long as Israel is the occupier of Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and usurps Islamic land and the rights of the Muslims.

The author rightly concludes that in contemporary Islamic societies religious arguments are a matter of interpretation, and motivated commentators will find plenty of evidence for either view. In addressing the question why is it that Islamic discourse in favor of peace with Israel is not gathering greater momentum in the Middle East he mentions five reasons: the clerics supporting peace are regime based; religious rhetoric in favor of peace is received with suspicion because the same regime for many years, promoted the opposite view; the political climate projected by Israel in Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories; The collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process; the demographic situation reflecting the fact that the Jews are a tiny minority in the predominantly Arab-Muslim Middle East, hence, Arabs will eventually triumph and will be able to turn back the wheel of history; peace is presented as an expression of the historically correct attitude towards the Jews, but not necessarily towards the Zionists.

In sum, Winter’s book is a must for every student, official or layman who is interested in understanding current Islamic political discourses. It contributed significantly to the body of research literature in the field of war and peace in contemporary Islam.

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