

Ben-Gurion's Spy

The Story of the Political Scandal that Shaped Modern Israel

by Shabtai Teveth

New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. 310 pp. \$25

Reviewed by Amos Perlmutter

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The leading biographer of David Ben-Gurion and one of Israel's outstanding journalists, Teveth has written a four-volume biography on Ben-Gurion and another two on key policy issues (attitudes toward the Palestinians and the Holocaust) of his long political life. Teveth's new book is a remarkable spy story as well as a penetrating political analysis. He writes with great verve and creates a sense of drama and excitement appropriate to this failed spy story.

The book reveals two intelligence fiascos committed by a Ben-Gurion favorite, Colonel Benyamin Givly. The first was a kangaroo court that in 1948 executed Meir Tobiansky, a Haganah leader wrongly suspected of collaborating with the British; Givly was responsible for the execution of Tobiansky. Ben-Gurion then promoted Givly to become head of IDF intelligence despite his doubts about this execution.

In the second case, Givly had a central role in the Lavon Affair of 1953, when the Israeli's (to create friction between the Egyptian government of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the United States) blew up an American library in Cairo to make it seem like an act of Egyptian terrorism. This act of supreme folly compromised the entire Israeli spy network in Egypt, then was covered up. It reemerged in 1961, when a conspirator revealed that Givly had falsified documents to implicate then-Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon.

Ben-Gurion had sponsored the brilliant, aggressive, and chicanerous Lavon, but refused him political exoneration when Lavon was implicated in the Egyptian operation. The Lavon Affair was the beginning of the end of the era of socialist Zionist political supremacy that had begun in 1935. Ironically, while Ben-Gurion masterfully created a modern state, he failed to play politics. It takes a giant to err gigantically.

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Article excerpt. Ben-Gurion's Spy: The Story of the Political Scandal that Shaped Modern Israel, by Shabtai Teveth. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. xxx + 274 pages. Teveth recounts the initial phase of the Mishap and discusses the question of who gave the order for the bombing that ended with the forced resignation of Lavon, the removal of Givly, and Ben-Gurion's return as minister of defense in Moshe Sharett's cabinet. Teveth continues with Lavon's and Givly's attempts to clear their names, that led to the second phase-"The Lavon Affair." Peer-reviewed publications on Questia are publications containing articles which were subject to evaluation for accuracy and substance by professional peers of the article's author(s). Publication: The Middle East Journal. Ben-Gurion re- fr-rsed to deal w.rth the i.ssure concl-rsivell- and ordered a thror-rgh. Sudicial cornmission rnto the rvhole contr.oversv and rvas eventual rng and r-inclear. Hon,ever, Bert-Guriort s Spy is a fascinatrng, rn-. {blmatrve and usefu} addrtion to the r,rnderstandrng of Israeli poi- rtics. Though devoted t,o the Lavon conttotretsy, it provrdes r-rseful. insights into the u,orking of the Israeli political s1.stem. Ben-Gu'ion,'s Sp7': The Stor1, sf tlt.e Poltttcol Scattdal tlrut. Shaped Modern Isoel-P . R. Kumalasrvarny 65. While Lavon and Ben- Gurion are ultimately responsible for the controversial acts of sabotage in Egypt, they seem too far up the chain of command to be considered active conspirators in these events. Teveth thinks otherwise and also insists that ``there is enough evidence to prove that without the Lavon Affair, Menahem Begin's Likud Party would not have come to power." But, as he admits, Labor's decline is widely linked to unpreparedness for the Yom Kippur War. Ben-gurion's spy. The story of the political scandal that shaped modern israel. by Shabtai Teveth • RELEASE DATE: June 13, 1996. An overlong recounting of a long-past Israeli political scandal. Last time I was in Israel (2009), I was stopped briefly at the border in Ben Gurion Airport when the agent found a Pakistan visa in my passport. I was also stopped again when returning from Palestinian-controlled territory because I had no Israeli stamp in my passport (Israel no longer stamps passports, but at the time they did unless you requested them not to). None of those stamps were in my current passport, but I assume Israeli officials had access to my travel history. Finally, my work history. I've worked for the U.S. federal government, served in the U.S. military, and carried a high-level security clearance. On the one hand, you'd think that would work in my favor, but I can see why that would also arouse suspicion in the convoluted world of espionage, even between allies. CONCLUSION. The leading biographer of David Ben-Gurion and one of Israel's outstanding journalists, Teveth has written a four-volume biography on Ben-Gurion and another two on key policy issues (attitudes toward the Palestinians and the Holocaust) of his long political life. Teveth's new book is a remarkable spy story as well as a penetrating political analysis. He writes with great verve and creates a sense of drama and excitement appropriate to this failed spy story. The book reveals two intelligence fiascos committed by a Ben-Gurion favorite, Colonel Benyamin Givly. The first was a kangaroo c