

# H-Diplo ESSAY 201

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Several currents came together to shape my career as a political scientist with a special interest in the Middle East and in American foreign policy. The first involved two moments of living abroad at a formative time in my life. Then there were a number of fine academics at Stanford and MIT in the 1960s who showed me how to bring an analytical perspective to the study of politics. Finally, I had the chance to serve twice on the staff of the National Security Council in the 1970s, dealing with complex issues surrounding the Arab-Israeli conflict. Below I will briefly spell out how these three sets of experiences brought me to the point of seeing international diplomacy and politics as I do.

I grew up in Los Angeles with very little exposure to international affairs until I had the opportunity in the summer of 1958 to go to Japan as an exchange student for the summer. My father had travelled to Japan as a young man in the 1930s, and he was very supportive of my going. The resulting experience was a real eye-opener and life-changer for me. I lived with a wonderful family in the small town of Ashiya, near Osaka. I tried to learn a bit of Japanese before I arrived, but I never gained fluency. Still, I spent most of my time in a Japanese-speaking environment and had the sense each day of needing to pay close attention to the subtle cultural signals that I did not always understand on first encounter. Gradually I came to feel very comfortable in the new family setting and came to admire much about Japanese society, culture, and art. This was the beginning of a life-long curiosity about other parts of the world. Although I did not pursue Asian studies in college, I attribute my abiding interest in international affairs to this first experience abroad in Japan. I visited Japan several more times in later years, once memorably with my wife, Helena Cobban, my daughter, Lorna Quandt, and my sister, Emmy Good. We had on that occasion a memorable reunion with the whole extended Murai family that I had lived with.

My second overseas experience came in 1960-1961 when, as a sophomore at Stanford University, I went to France and Switzerland for a year of study. This experience gave me the chance to gain near fluency in French. It also exposed me to many new international issues; the Algerian war for independence was winding down while I was in France, and my French friends were intensely following and debating its course; part of the French army threatened a coup against President de Gaulle in spring 1961, and I still remember his appeal to the French public to help him. Then, just as I was leaving for home, the Berlin wall went up, a stark reminder of the Cold War and the division of Europe. These were big, exciting issues that formed the backdrop for my year abroad, and I returned to the United States in the fall of 1961 with a determination to pursue a career studying international affairs.

While studying at the *Institut de Hautes Etudes Internationales* in Geneva in spring 1961, I took my first two serious classes on international affairs taught by the talented Stanley Hoffmann. His ability to integrate history with major themes and concepts involving war and peace left me with an abiding belief that a deep engagement with history was a precondition for

understanding politics. His classic book, *Gulliver's Troubles*<sup>1</sup>, is still worth reading for an appreciation of the limits of the power of supposedly 'great' powers.

The professor at Stanford who had the strongest influence on me at this formative time was Robert North, a remarkably interesting scholar who had written about the emerging conflict between the Soviet Union and China and was just beginning to turn his attention to quantitative methods in the study of international politics. I took every course he taught and spent the summer of 1962 working on one of his research projects. The quantitative approach did not win me over, but his sharp analytical mind, the breadth of his interests, and his decent values made a lasting impression on me.

The other Stanford professor who helped persuade me that an academic career in political science would be worth pursuing was Heinz Eulau. Unlike North, Eulau was focused entirely on American politics, theory, and methods. He taught his students how to develop hypotheses, then to test them with evidence, and he loved to discuss, debate, and challenge conventional wisdom. He introduced me to the world of American political science, and that certainly helped as I turned my attention later on to American foreign policy.

By the time I was in my fourth year at Stanford, I was determined to go to graduate school. North and Eulau were supportive, and they called my attention to a relatively new graduate program at MIT. What made MIT at that time distinctive was the presence of a remarkable faculty, but as yet very few graduate students. This meant that those of us who entered the program in the mid-1960s had outstanding professors and very small classes. (We could also cross-register to take classes at Harvard).

I was drawn to two tracks of study at MIT. First were those working in the field of comparative politics, and what was then called the 'politics of developing areas.' Myron Weiner, Lucian Pye, Frederick Frey, Ithiel Pool and Daniel Lerner were among the best known of this subfield, and I studied with all of them and learned a great deal. I also took courses from William Kaufmann and Fred Iklé in the field of 'security studies.' (I also took a memorable course on 'math models for the social sciences,' taught by a Harvard graduate student named Tom Lehrer. This was a familiar name, since I had grown up in the 1950s listening to his irreverent and often transgressive songs, and, sure enough, it was the same person. But in class he was deadpan serious, teaching us about probability, rotating matrices, and correlation. Only at the occasional faculty-student parties would he sit down at the piano and sing "Poisoning Pigeons in the Park" or "Fight Fiercely Harvard," and other classics from his amazingly original repertoire.)

At some point in my second year, I took a course with Myron Weiner, a great specialist on India, and each student had to pick a newly independent country and write about some aspect of its political development. Thinking back on my experience in France in 1960-61, I chose Algeria. I knew that Algeria had finally gained its independence in 1962, but I had not really paid much attention to what had happened thereafter. I knew that most of the relevant literature would be in French, but I was confident I could handle that. And I checked to see that the Harvard library was well stocked with books that would provide solid background. By the time I had completed my research paper for Weiner, I was intrigued by the challenge that Algerians were facing in making the transition from a liberation movement to a functioning government.

No one at MIT knew anything about Algeria, but Weiner and others in the department were eager to get their students into the field to do research. So I was encouraged to deepen my focus on this little-known (in America) country and to put together a dissertation proposal. I naively asked what would then happen. The answer was straight forward advice: start studying Arabic; take courses on the Middle East and North Africa at Harvard; then get a fellowship (Social Science Research Council) to do research in Algeria; write the dissertation and get it published. That pretty much describes what I then did for the next several years. (It is now common to find my mentors who promoted 'modernization theory' to be viewed as rather naïve and Western-centric. But my experience with them was quite different. They did not all see things the

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles: Or, the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

same way, they engaged in vigorous, non-dogmatic discussions. They valued field research, and they were extremely supportive of younger scholars.)

In summer 1966, I arrived in Tunis to study Arabic at the Bourguiba Institute. By the end of the summer I was on my way to Algiers, with no local contacts and very little idea of how to get started with my research. Fortunately, I made some helpful contacts early on, including one of the heroines of the war for independence, Zohra Drif, who was then head of a small research institute at the time. She listened to my endless questions, agreed to be interviewed, and, very importantly, introduced me to others who had played major roles in the Algerian revolution and were now struggling with the issues of independent governance. (Her recently published book, *Inside the Battle of Algiers*,<sup>2</sup> is well worth reading.)

As I was wrapping up my research in summer 1967, the Arab-Israeli 'Six-Day war' broke out, and suddenly I was made aware of another major development in the broad Middle East region. I had been so focused on Algeria that I had been paying little attention to events in the eastern Arab world, but I did make a note to myself that I needed to broaden my focus beyond Algeria once the dissertation was finished.

Back in Cambridge in fall 1967, I wrote my dissertation, which was soon published as *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria 1954-1968*.<sup>3</sup> I was pleased to have the book in print, but was also aware that there was little interest in the United States on the topic of my research. So I was ready to broaden my focus, and the Arab-Israeli conflict seemed like one place to start. I considered academic positions, but then Fred Iklé, who was about to become head of the social science division at Rand in Santa Monica, California, asked if I would like to join the department and work on the Middle East and U.S. foreign policy. I decided to accept, and that led me to a more policy-oriented phase of my research.

For four years, 1968 to 1972, I worked at Rand. One project gave me the chance to interview many people who had shaped U.S. policy toward the Middle East in the previous decades. I also decided to focus on the emerging Palestinian armed movement, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had many similarities, I thought, to the Algerian *Front de libération nationale* (FLN). That project resulted in the publication of *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism*,<sup>4</sup> co-authored with Ann Lesch and Fuad Jabber.

Early in 1972, I was encouraged to apply for a fellowship at the Council on Foreign Affairs that was designed to give scholars a chance to spend one year working in government in a field of their expertise. By this time, I had made some contacts with people at the State Department and especially at the National Security Council, where I had met Harold Saunders, the head of the Middle East office. He had been very helpful to me in some of my research, and I was impressed with his knowledge and his thoughtful way of discussing policy issues. He had worked on the NSC under presidents John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and then Richard Nixon, an example of how it was possible, even common, to work at that time for both Democrats and Republicans. So I asked Saunders if I might be able to work in his office if I managed to get the Council fellowship, and he soon told me that it was possible.

This led to the third major formative set of experiences that shaped my career -- my first of two stints at the NSC. I began work there in fall 1972, an election year. Not surprisingly, Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger were not much interested in tackling the Arab-Israeli issue until the election was over. The first months in proximity to presidential decision-making were not terribly exciting, although it was clear that events in the Middle East were moving in new directions. By early 1973, there were some intriguing developments in relations with Egypt, but Nixon was by now mired down with the Watergate crisis and it was not a good time to expect him to tackle anything as sensitive as the Arab-

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<sup>2</sup> Zohra Drif, *Inside the Battle of Algiers: Memoir of a Woman Freedom Fighter* (Charlottesville: Just World Books, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> William B. Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria 1954-1968* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Quandt, Fuad Jabber, and Ann Lesch, *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

Israeli conflict. So as I came toward the end of my first year, without very much happening in terms of U.S.-led initiatives that I might be involved with, I decided to see if I could stay on for one more year in the hope that I would be able to participate in more interesting developments.

By this time, I was the deputy in the Middle East office of the NSC, reporting to Saunders, and through him, to Kissinger. During September 1973, we began to receive intelligence that tensions were rising on both the Egyptian and Syrian fronts with Israel. The Soviets had warned us that President Anwar Sadat was losing patience and was thinking of starting military hostilities, and the Saudis were threatening that we could not continue to count on the uninterrupted flow of oil if the United States kept backing Israel unquestioningly. On October 5, 1973, I suddenly became acting head of the office, and I realized that there was a real chance that war might break out at any moment. In fact, the next day I received a call early in the morning from the Situation Room in the White House conveying the message that the Israelis had finally received confirmed intelligence that the war would begin later that day, as it did. For the next three weeks, I learned up close what crisis decision making was like. I also was able to follow the first phases of the U.S.-led 'peace process' after the 1973 war, which gave me much of the substantive material that formed the basis of my next book, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976*.<sup>5</sup> In writing this book, as one might guess from its title, I was influenced by Graham Allison's study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Essence of Decision*.<sup>6</sup> (Three later editions my book, updated through the early 2000s, appeared under a different title: *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*).<sup>7</sup>

After two years teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, I returned to the NSC to head the Middle East office, reporting to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and the new president, Jimmy Carter. I was fortunate that the two people I worked directly for were genuinely interested in the Middle East and especially in the possibility of moving the Arab-Israeli peace process forward. I had the chance to get to know most of the major actors and to be present at many of the important events, including the thirteen days at Camp David in September 1978. Later I wrote *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*.<sup>8</sup>

In short, my career as a scholar and policy analyst was pretty well set by the late 1970s. My early experience of living abroad, then my formal education, and finally the chance to work in government on the issues that I had previously studied produced the combination of curiosity about the world, an academic and analytical perspective on political issues, and some real-world experience with policy that have underpinned all that I have done professionally. I took those qualities with me in my next two career moves, first to the Brookings Institution (1979-1994) and then to the University of Virginia (1994-2014) and continue to draw on them in retirement.

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<sup>5</sup> Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Little Brown, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1986, and Brookings Classic Edition, 2016).

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