

The Crash of Flight 3804 - A Lost Spy, A Daughter's Quest, and the Deadly Politics of the Great Game for Oil

A Book Review

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Titles can be deceptive – “The Crash of Flight 3804” meant nothing for all my readings of history and geopolitics. It was not about the crash that killed Dag Hammerskjold, nor about any of the more recent crashes like the U.S. navy shoot down of Iran Air 655 in 1988. Even the subtitle seemed deceptively uninteresting until it read “and the Deadly Politics of the Great Game for Oil.” As usual, the determining factor became the author – a lawyer, an investigative journalist, and a Middle East reporter of the kind that has actually been on the ground in a few of the controversial areas. Hesitantly, I decided to give it a read.

Frequently I am asked if there is a book I would recommend to give a primer or an overview for certain geopolitical arenas – usually the Middle East, and Israel/Palestine. And quite frequently it is difficult to find a book that covers the requested topics in a way to serve as both an introduction and as a significant, accurate, and highly readable ‘story’, although there are many excellent books on specific topics. This book, “The Crash of Flight 3804” is now that recommendation.

Apart from the personal aspects of the story, which is the fine and not overstated thread throughout as well as the motivation, Charlotte Dennett has written an excellent book summarizing the geopolitics of the Middle East historically through to current events. Her main theme is essentially follow the pipelines, follow the money, and by doing so she traces a history of espionage, geopolitical gamesmanship, and terror that defines what makes the Middle East today.

History

The history begins with the personal element, the killing/murder of her father in Flight 3804 from Jidda to Addis Abbab in March 1947. From that came the revelation that her father Daniel Dennett was a U.S. master spy examining the events in the Middle East before Israel created its state in the 1948 nakba and before the creation of the CIA, but not before oil, pipelines and big money had already shaped the political and geographical landscapes.

The history works mostly forwards but traces back to World War I, the intrigues of the

Germans with the Ottoman empire, the attempts by the British, French, and Russians to establish controlling interests in the oil rich region as oil became the power for the military and the industrialists of the era. It puts in place the Zionist proposals and actions, the Balfour letter (and it was just a letter, not a law), and the situation with the Saudis and other relationships within the declining Ottoman empire.

The focal point for the geopolitics is the story of pipelines, for whoever controls the pipelines controls the movement and endpoint of the vast oil fields of the Middle East. Fortunately Dennett has included many maps drawing the outlines of the region and the many planned and built pipelines, and for current events, the location of newer oil fields that are and will cause current and not so future problems – the Levantine Basin in the Eastern Mediterranean, the untapped sources in Yemen, and new potentially large discoveries in the illegally occupied Golan Heights.

Money

As a story of money and oil the names of traditional bankers rise reasonably frequently – the Rockefellers and the Rothschilds predominating. As I read it occurred to me that she was not really discussing the development of the petrodollar until –

“...the wars [all Middle East wars] have been linked to the US command of the oil-based petrodollar, much as they have been linked to the control of oil, and most significantly Saudi oil...and oil in Iraq...and possibly the oil in Yemen....the larger part of what is known as “dollar hegemony” is the control of oil.”

The reader is introduced to the wars in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Syria in particular as part of the need to control petrodollar hegemony, as “a switch by OPEC from a dollar standard to a euro standard would be the Federal Reserve’s biggest nightmare.” Dennett does not develop this idea but if it needs stating: without oil being mandated as priced in US dollars, the economy of the US. would collapse as its dollar would become worthless – no one would need the dollars to purchase oil with and the huge U.S. debts supported by the advantage of being the global reserve currency would collapse.

So oil pipelines are big money, the petrodollar is the global reserve currency and the U.S. uses its vast military to support it,

...the country that espouses liberty for all is in fact an economic empire backed by military legions, one only needs to look at the number of US troops and military bases that the United States commands around the world....

Israel

Dennett’s chapter “The Hidden History of Pipeline Politics in Palestine and Israel” provides an insightful summary by way of examining who controls pipelines within the problems that currently beset Israel/Palestine and the general Middle East. Not many historians mention it but the military-oil aspect of the creation of Israel is well supported. Using old maps as her guide to some of her research and questions, she asked,

“Where, I asked myself, was the military base that would protect the Trans-Arabian Pipeline? It wasn’t in Lebanon. It wasn’t in Syria. And then it hit me.

It wasn't in Israel. It was Israel."

Historically Dennett begins with World War I,

"...fought, in large part, not to make the world safe for democracy but to help robber barons reap enormous profits and establish spheres of influence in resource-rich parts of the world, including the Middle East."

The British Empire straddled the world, and the Zionists "advocated for a Jewish state in Palestine as a European outpost to protect the Red Sea and Britain's vital trade route to India." The Balfour Letter among its several purposes was related to British "imperial interests" in Mesopotamian and Palestine.

During World War II, arguably the last battle of World War I, the geopolitical positioning of the U.S. played an important role in the holocaust. The U.S. became aware of the genocide in 1943, but worried about Ibn Saud and possible threats to "end the United States' exclusive oil concession in Saudi Arabia if increased Jewish immigration to Palestine were allowed" the U.S. decided against bombing Auschwitz in order to end that part of the German program.

At the end of the war, British imperial power was in sharp decline and the U.S. was the global leader in military and economic power. At this point, "Protection of the Saudi oil concession and the Saudi pipeline "at all costs" trumped all other considerations," and a "strong militarized Israel could serve as the key regional protector of the Saudi pipeline." The result is that today, "a powerful coalition comprised of the Zionist lobby, evangelical Protestants and armsmakers now constitutes significant domestic constraint on those who might seek to alter U.S. policy towards Israel."

Recent events concerning Palestine - in particular Gaza and its Mediterranean coast - and Israel focus on pipelines not yet built as the countries of the Levant argue over the newly discovered oil and gas resources under the Mediterranean. Once again, a clear map shows the outlines of the gas and oil fields and the coastal water limits of each of the littoral countries.

In sum Dennett argues,

"...as we consider what has happened in the Middle East over the past seven decades, and what is happening today in Syria, Iraq, Gaza, and now Yemen, we have question whether the timeworn quest for oil - to be pursued "at all costs" - lies at the heart of many of these tragedies."

Afterwords

In her afterwords, Dennett becomes a bit soft and fuzzy towards the CIA as they finally recognize the contribution her father made to espionage efforts in the Middle East and the knowledge he displayed concerning the region. She and her family are visited by three CIA agents - one a psychiatrist, one in the role of the consoling historian (with the official version) , and the big guy who did not play much of a verbal role. They presented arguments that Flight 3804 crashed due to bad weather, without knowing that Dennett's

own research indicated the weather was clear and stable for the flight.

Yet after being wined and dined and fêted by the CIA she implies that she accepts their efforts to save American democracy, and wonders about the “marauding militias [Middle East terrorists] killing civilians and frankly undoing the well-intentioned efforts to win over hearts and minds.” Her last perspective offers two possibilities: a lifetime of being filled with American exceptionalism and indispensability; or perhaps a caution for herself not to be persecuted and targeted by the CIA.

Surely if she read her own words she would not think the efforts were “well intentioned” except for anyone but the monied oil barons and the interlocking corporations of the military-industrial-financial institutions of the U.S. As for hearts and minds, she unfortunately reduces her own presentation by denying the force of her arguments that this had nothing to do with either good intentions or hearts and minds, that killing civilians – as per her own arguments – is what the militarized U.S. does, and above all it is about oil and money.

Better to let her father have the main afterward:

“Pray to God that wherever else we may choose to intervene, the United States will be spared the disgrace of intervening in the Near East.” [Clark University Speech, 1942.]

Read it!

Regardless of her short softened ending, this is an amazing piece of historical writing. Her unique focus on pipelines quite literally creates a web of intrigue throughout the Middle East. It can serve as an historical primer for many events concerning the Middle East. It serves as an excellent summary, introducing and clearly explaining without huge detail, the machinations of U.S. and other imperial interests in the region. Students, foreign affairs ‘experts’ and officials should have this work as required reading.

This is an engaging insightful book that I recommend as a primer or an overview for the Middle East and the U.S.’ overall imperial drive around the world.

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Jim Miles is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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