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The Liberty Incident: The 1967 Israeli Attack on the U.S.
Navy Spy Ship (review)

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mistaken identity persuasive. Sadly, we cannot expect it to persuade the powerful and persistent “Liberty Lobby” in the U.S., which brushes off every Israeli apology as readily as it embraces every conspiracy theory. Oren notes that after thirty-five years no plausible motive for such an attack has surfaced, and given the Israelis’ cautious and convoluted political-military decision making process (which he so ably documents), it is impossible to disagree with him.

Oren somewhat surprisingly lapses into ambiguity at the end of his narrative. He asserts that “Even from the perspective of thirty-five years, the answer to the question ‘Did six days of war truly change the Middle East?’ remains equivocal.” But the record of the past three decades suggests that in occupying Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem the Israelis made a decisive break with the past. They got into colonialism, and opened the door to a settlement movement that has frustrated every attempt to bring peace to the region. The key counterfactual is how the Palestinian community on the West Bank might have evolved had Jordan showed the modicum of restraint that would have stayed the Israelis’ hand in 1967. Given the opportunity, would Palestinians have resigned themselves to becoming citizens of Jordan instead of collectively endorsing “PLO, Inc.?” The answer is beyond the scope of Oren’s book, but he might have posed the question.

Ralph M. Hitchens

Poolesville, Maryland

The Liberty Incident: The 1967 Israeli Attack on the U.S. Navy Spy Ship.

By A. Jay Cristol. Washington: Brassey’s, 2002. ISBN 1-57488-414-X. Maps. Photographs. Illustrations. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xx, 294. \$27.50.

On 8 June 1967, during the Six Day War fought by Israel against Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, the Israeli Air Force and Navy attacked a U.S. signals intelligence ship, the USS *Liberty*, killing thirty-four Americans and injuring 171. The *Liberty* was in a declared war zone, fourteen miles off the Sinai, but whether Israel knew it was attacking an American ship or mistakenly believed it was an Egyptian vessel has become fodder for outlandish conspiracy theories and added to the polemics of the Arab-Israeli conflict. One need only conduct a search for the USS *Liberty* on the Internet to see the scope of the material. The author convincingly concludes that the attack on the *Liberty* was the result of many tragic mistakes and that Israel did not knowingly attack an American ship.

A. Jay Cristol is uniquely qualified as a former U.S. Navy aviator and lawyer, civil lawyer, and federal judge to examine the *Liberty* incident. He conducted over five hundred interviews for this book and is the only non-Israeli to interview the pilots who attacked the *Liberty*. His research is based on every available source, including many recently de-classified documents. His sources and research are carefully cited and are maintained by the

Hoover Institution of Stanford University for further study.

The *Liberty* has been the subject of thirteen U.S. and Israeli investigations, all of which concluded that the attack was an accident. However, conspiracy theories abound because many of the documents and investigations remained classified for years, and since the U.S. has never factually stated the *Liberty*'s mission, which was probably to monitor Egyptian communications. Some of the theories in circulation regarding the *Liberty* are that the U.S. and Israel colluded to attack the *Liberty* to destroy evidence that the U.S. was assisting Israel, that the Israelis attempted to destroy the ship because it intercepted Israeli transmissions which tricked Jordan into entering the war, and that Israel attacked the *Liberty* because the ship learned of Israel's secret intention to attack Syria. The author disproves these and other wild speculations and offers a critique of the large body of work on the subject. Some of the author's sharpest criticism is aimed at the recent book by James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, and a History Channel program, *Cover-Up: Attack on the USS Liberty*, which was "produced without adequate research, fact-checking, and attention to detail" (p. 184).

The author concludes that the attack on the *Liberty* resulted from a series of mistakes—the failure of the *Liberty* to receive five transmitted orders directing it to leave the war zone, the Israeli Navy's eagerness to see action, a rivalry between the Israeli Navy and Air Force, the misidentification of the *Liberty* as an Egyptian ship, and several others. This book is a must for anyone studying the *Liberty* controversy, which it brings to a close.

David M. Witty

Amman, Jordan

The Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War. By David Anderson. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-231-11492-3. Maps. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 308. \$45.00.

Twenty-seven years after the fall of Saigon to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the American war in Vietnam remains a controversial and complicated event for the population of the United States to comprehend. In *The Columbia Guide to the Vietnam War*, David Anderson attempts to simplify the approach to understanding the war by presenting a source that is a "versatile, objective, and reliable" guide for readers who seek "to understand the intense and significant debate over the war" (p. xii) and is intended to make the history of the conflict "accessible to contemporary readers and applicable to their concerns" (p. xi). The book follows in the historiographical tradition of the various earlier compendia on the conflict such as John Bowman's *The Vietnam War: An Almanac* (1985), James Olson's *Dictionary of the Vietnam War* (1988), Stanley Kutler's *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* (1996), and Spencer Tucker's *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* (1998).

The well-organized book is divided into five parts: a historical narrative of the war (86 pages); a mini-encyclopedia of key events (87 pages); indi-