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Flight of the Lavi: Inside a U.S.-Israeli Crisis

C. E. Armstrong

Dov S. Zakheim

gracefully as possible, and because the South Vietnamese army fought very hard. Air power was pivotal but not decisive.

Pape concludes that strategic bombing is perceived as an alternative to the bloody realities of war because political leaders are ever in search of cheap solutions to complex international problems. Now dubbed the "strategic air campaign" by the neo-Douhetans, the notion that striking "critical nodes" in electrical, communications, and transportation systems can bring quick, easy, and painless victory is still appealing. Unfortunately, while history does not bear out this argument, most political leaders and too many military leaders are not savvy enough to counter these historically corrupt and false promises.

Pape might have bolstered his case by giving the U.S. Air Force more credit for doing what it was designed and structured to do in the post–Korean War era: to deter the Soviet Union by the threat of massive nuclear retaliation. The Strategic Air Command, which by 1959 counted 1,854 bombers in its inventory, succeeded in its primary mission of deterrence by being prepared to obliterate the Soviet Union, China, and the Warsaw Pact nations, should that have been necessary. But since the world of 1997 is very different from that of 1959 or even 1989, this ought not be of much comfort to die-hard air power enthusiasts. The United States Air Force could, in fact, be quite vulnerable—its reason for being is not so apparent today as it once was.

Bombing to Win is a critically important book. If we are fortunate, Warden and his followers will mount a "counter-Pape" campaign in various professional journals, and our corporate knowledge will grow by the ensuing debate. In any event, every member of the National Defense Panel should be sent a copy of *Bombing to Win*.

EARL H. TILFORD, JR.
Army War College
Strategic Studies Institute

Zakheim, Dov S. *Flight of the Lavi: Inside a U.S.-Israeli Crisis*. New York: Brassey's, 1996. 277pp. $25.95

"How can a nice Jewish boy oppose the State of Israel?"

Dov Zakheim, an Orthodox Jew and a former United States Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense, has written a gripping account of his role in the cancellation of Israel's Lavi fighter program. It was a role that would test his analytical abilities, his patience, and his courage, and it would bring great pressure to bear on members of his family, not all of whom agreed with his effort to end the Lavi program.

Designing and developing a new tactical airplane, particularly a new fighter, is a very exciting and emotional undertaking even for the larger, established aircraft manufacturing companies. But when the designer, developer, and prospective builder is Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI), which views the project as a first-rate tactical aircraft that is necessary to increase the warfighting capabilities of the Israeli Air Force and as a vehicle to expand Israel's technology base and provide jobs for Israeli workers, as well as strengthen Israel's foreign military sales (all at the expense of the United

States), emotions in Israel and in the American Jewish community run very high indeed. That these emotions would involve Zakheim's immediate family should come as no surprise to the reader.

Some might think that assigning an Orthodox Jew the responsibility for killing a pet Israeli fighter program was an extremely Machiavillian exploitation of that official. Zakheim, however, clearly took the high road in his assignment from the Secretary of Defense, applying that which is too often missing from official decision making—common sense based on responsible analysis. Clearly, there were those whose expectation was that the United States would pay for whatever equipment and systems the Israelis said they needed—expectations justified by thirty years of nearly unlimited support.

However, this time there simply were not enough U.S. defense dollars to go around. The issue was not whether Israel needed a new-generation fighter plane—it did—or whether IAI was capable of executing a major tactical airplane program—IAI had already proved itself capable in the 1970s with the very successful Kfir program. The issue was whether there was a more cost-effective alternative that would meet Israel's fighter requirements without crippling other vital defense programs. There were several candidates. Working from costing templates developed for similar U.S. fighter programs and information only grudgingly provided by IAI, Zakheim and his team of Department of Defense analysts were able to show convincingly that cost and schedule projections for the development and production of the Lavi were excessively optimistic. Convincing the Lavi's strong body of supporters in IAI and at the highest levels of both the Israeli and U.S. governments took more than two years. Finally the Israeli cabinet canceled the program at the end of August 1987. In the final analysis, Zakheim's successful efforts to force termination of the Lavi program were in the best interests of both Israel and the United States.

Dov Zakheim's account of his meetings with the most senior Israeli leaders, including two prime ministers, and with key members of the U.S. Congress for a period of over two years is fascinating. More fascinating, however, is the opportunity to glimpse the intricate personal relationships between key Israeli leaders and the American-Jewish community (of which Zakheim's father was a prominent member, as well as a lifelong personal friend to many of the Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir).

There are several "pieces" to this book: the story of the Lavi program and its ultimate cancellation; the story of Dov Zakheim's intensely stressful personal involvement in leading the fight against the program; and the story of a deeply religious and patriotic man who compromised neither his strong beliefs, nor his heritage, nor his commitment to serve his country. Finally, Zakheim's weaving of the political and the programmatic with his religious beliefs and his insights into the commitment of Orthodox Jewry is both interesting and enlightening.

C.E. ARMSTRONG
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy, Retired