

A Choice of Enemies – America Confronts the Middle East by Lawrence Freedman.
Weidenfeld and Nicolson 2008.

A Choice of Enemies is Lawrence Freedman's answer to a question posed by his daughter Ruth during a family conversation, and it is, as he acknowledges, a very long answer indeed! But the length of this superb book, which analyses US policy in the Middle East between 1979 and early 2008 is a positive plus, because it enables the author to give due attention to the strategy of successive Presidential administrations, and in teasing out the decisions made, and their aftermath to arrive at some important conclusions with regard to the future.

Professor Freedman divides this 'magisterial survey' (a phrase he uses at the start of the book to refer to Michael Oren's Power, Faith and Fantasy and which his own eminently deserves) into five sections, covering the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H W Bush, Bill Clinton and George W Bush. Students of Middle East affairs will find all the subjects they would expect in these sections, including *inter alia* the Iranian Revolution, The Mujahideen in Afghanistan and Iran-Contra, Desert Storm and the failure of Camp David to achieve an Israel-Palestinian peace deal, and the War on Terror.

The detail in A Choice of Enemies is impressive, the perspective given not only by Lawrence Freedman's scholarship but also his assiduous choice of supporting scholarly and political opinion is invaluable and the total package is an unsurpassed survey of the last three decades of American involvement in the world's most explosive region.

A Choice of Enemies is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand why American foreign policy under successive administrations has brought the reputation of America down to the subterranean place it currently inhabits in the Middle East, why the misguided decisions taken over so many years were made, and the height of the mountain that President Obama has to climb if he is to rectify the awful legacy he has inherited, never mind actually making progress towards genuine peace.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh