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The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

The conflict between Palestine and Israel is one of the most highly publicized and bitter struggles of modern times, a dangerous tinderbox always poised to set the Middle East aflame--and to draw the United States into the fire. In this accessible and stimulating Very Short Introduction, Martin Bunton illuminates the history of the problem, reducing it to its very essence. Adopting a fresh and original approach, Bunton explores the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in twenty-year segments, to highlight the historical complexity of the conflict throughout successive decades. Each chapter starts with an examination of the relationships among people and events that marked particular years as historical stepping stones in the evolution of the conflict, including the 1897 Basle Congress, the 1917 Balfour Declaration and British occupation of Palestine, and the 1947 UN Partition Plan and the war for Palestine. Providing a clear and fair exploration of the main issues, Bunton explores not only the historical basis of the conflict, but also looks at how and why partition has been so difficult and how efforts to restore peace continue today.

About the Series: Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book as a better way to understand the origins of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Since most online sources seem to be very bias one way or the other, I was hoping this would be more objective. As someone who doesn't favor one side or the other, the bias against Israel was fairly apparent. Often times, the author would describe Israel's actions as excessive and brutal, but would seem to completely ignore or only mention in passing equally brutal tactics and acts by the PLO and Hamas. In times where the IDF took military action against Arab states, the text almost portrays IDF victories as unfair because the IDF was better trained and armed whereas Arab aggressors couldn't effectively coordinate between one another. He also mentions things like the mass expulsion of Palestinians after the 1948 war, but (unless I missed it) didn't really mention the expulsion of Jews from Arabs states following that same war. Just a few examples. Often times I would pause when reading and look up events on things like Wikipedia only to find that Wikipedia contained more facts and dialogue that would balance the argument between the Israelis and Palestinians, whereas this book would seem to lean more towards a pro-Palestinian narrative. I've noticed other reviews of this book, even highly rated reviews, call out this pro-Palestinian bias. With all that said, I suppose I met my objective in that I certainly better understand both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel arguments in this conflict. I found the writing itself to be a bit clunky and difficult to follow in certain spots. While the chapters themselves were written in chronological order, the text within the chapters seemed to jump around a bit.

At the outset, I feel it is important to read histories, commentaries and journals that espouse differing views and perspectives. The subject of the modern Middle East, of course, is fraught with intense emotion and strong opinions, with a strong religious, as well as political viewpoint. This is all a given. Having said that, I have decidedly mixed feeling over this short history. On the one hand, it gives a general outline on the issue. There is nothing that I recall that was factually incorrect. It addresses the claims of Palestinians quite strongly, but on the other hand, it downplays, in an often clinical manner, the reasons why Zionism took hold among Jews and among a many non-Jews in

the 1930s and 1940s. In that regard, the role of Holocaust is consistently marginalized. People were desperate to escape certain death. It also fails to address the changes in British attitudes to the creation of a Jewish state in the decades after the Balfour Declaration to an almost de facto siding with the Arabs by 1945. It also casts the attack on the newly-born state by several standing Arab armies as a kind of lip service, but treating the Israeli victory in the 1947-48 war as a foregone conclusion. Similarly, it downplays the egregious and in retrospect, politically reckless conduct of Arab governments in overpromising Palestinians victory -- and the resulting and continuing refugee crisis that continues to the very day. In the portions that a more recent, Mr. Bunton's book should detail the reasons why the missed opportunities for peace -- in 2000, for example -- with more detail. Arafat's failed brinksmanship (which angered former President Clinton who essentially blamed him, not Israel, for the breakdown).

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