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Hot Spots in Global Politics

This book is a superb little gem. It is very well written; makes good use of quotes and sources, and, most of all, is an excellent introduction to the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Dowty is remarkably fair. Both sides have their views presented in a compelling manner; both die-hard Zionists and Palestinian activists will find much to admire - and resent - about this hook.

Steven David, Johns Hopkins University

"Alan Dowty's Israel/Palestine is an authoritative and extraordinarily valuable text for courses on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Rare for its scrupulous attention to balance and careful examination of the responsibilities of all sides, Dowty not only offers an opportunity to evaluate critically their differences but also suggests the commonalities out of which the conflict could be resolved."

S. Ilan Jroen, Brandeis University and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

What explains the peculiar intensity and evident intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Of all the "hot spots" in the world today, the apparently endless clash between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East seems unique in its longevity and resistance to resolution. Is this conflict really different from other ethnic and nationalist confrontations, and if so, in what way?

Alan Dowty demystifies the conflict by putting it in broad historical perspective, identifying its roots, and tracing its evolution up to the current impasse. His account offers a clear analytic framework for understanding transformations over time, and in doing so, punctures the myths of an "age-old" conflict with an unbridgeable gap between the two sides. Rather than simply reciting historical detail, this book presents a clear overview that serves as a road map through the thicket of conflicting claims.

In this account the opposed perspectives of the two sides are presented in full, leaving readers to make their own evaluations of the issues. The book thus expresses fairly and objectively the concerns, hopes, fears, and passions of both sides, making it clear why this conflict is waged with such vehemence - and why, for all that, there are some grounds for optimism.

Alan Dowty is Professor Emeritus, University of Notre Dame, and Kahanoff Chair Professor in Israel Studies, University of Calgary
Amazon reviews

The Most Balanced Overview on the Conflict Out There

This book is fantastic. I use it to teach all of my programs that introduce people to the Arab-Israel conflict because it is by far the most objective overview of the conflict I’ve ever seen. It is concise, and offers readers a strong understanding of both the roots of the conflict, and the contemporary manifestations of the conflict on the ground - and all in less than 300 pages!

Dowty's approach to the subject is also very interesting - rather than telling the story of the Arab-Israel saga as merely a succession of wars (which is how most books present it), Dowty contextualizes the subject matter by first introducing the readers to the two over-riding narratives. The first chapter tells "The Jewish Story," showing clearly that, to understand Israel and the Israeli worldview, one must understand Jewish history and the constant theme of persecution and national disaster that runs through it from the Spanish Inquisition to the east European pogroms, to the Holocaust. Chapter 2 tells "The Arab Story," and shows clearly that one cannot understand the Arab/Palestinian story without a decent understanding of Arab/Muslim/Palestinian history including the "golden age" of Islam, the philosophy behind Islam, and also the legacy of the crusades and western colonialism of which many Arabs/Palestinians view Zionism as an extension.

If you are going to buy one book on the Arab-Israel conflict, this is the one you should buy. I have never heard anyone who has read the book say ANYTHING about bias; moreover, my students always rave about how refreshing it is to hear an objective voice amongst the clamor of the conflict.

The Best and Most Balanced Text on this Controversial Subject

I have used this book since the publication of the first edition as one of the main texts for courses I have taught at Rutgers University and more recently at the University of Michigan. My students (including many Arab-Americans, Muslims, and Jews) have found it to be both very balanced and blessedly free of professional jargon. It is comprehensive in coverage of the narratives of both protagonists, the historical background, processes of conflict, conflict management, and efforts toward conflict resolution. It masterfully explains the highly complex issues at stake with impressive clarity and balance. While there are scholarly treatments that contain more data and more extensive theoretical analysis, this is simply the very best and most balanced introductory text of which I am aware. I enthusiastically recommend it without reservation.

Myron J. Aronoff, Professor Emeritus, Rutgers University & Visiting Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan

A must read for anyone interested in the Arab-Israel conflict

A refreshingly unbiased account of an overly politicized field. Dowty does an exemplary job of laying out the fundamentals this conflict's history in a truthful and sincere manner. Both scholars and students would do well to replicate his approach to the study of the Arab-Israel conflict.

I recommend this book simply for the great collection of information it holds.

As other reviewers said, this book is relatively well-balanced. But be careful -- it's very difficult and nearly impossible to write a completely unbiased book. And anybody purchasing this book should note its pro-Israeli bias. To put the book to best use, it should be accompanied by a synopsis with a pro-Palestinian bias.

My major complaint in terms of bias is that the author constantly insists that the actions of Israel have been entirely existential while the Arab actors have consistently acted irrationally. Both wording and argument in this book assert that at many points in history, Israel had no other choice than to do exactly what it has done. Meanwhile, the Arab actors appear to be motivated by hatred for Jews, and the author never minds the common Arab viewpoint of Israelis as European invaders in land that is legitimately Arab. Dowty attempts to hide his bias by simply excusing the many failures of the Arabs as miscalculations, though the implications of his descriptions suggest that the miscalculations are caused by anti-Semitic sentiment.

Perhaps another complaint I have with this book claiming to be balanced is that the author does not demonstrate true understanding of the Arabs and their actions. Most striking is his claim that Muslims believe that Jesus resurrected (p48). Anybody claiming to understand the Arabs should know without hesitation that no Muslim in the world believes Jesus ever died -- let alone resurrecet! Such a belief would be directly contradictory to the Qur'an and is condemned universally among Muslims. I could accept the argument that Dowty intends a balanced synopsis, but I do not see how such a synopsis can be balanced if he does not know the basic tenets of Islam.