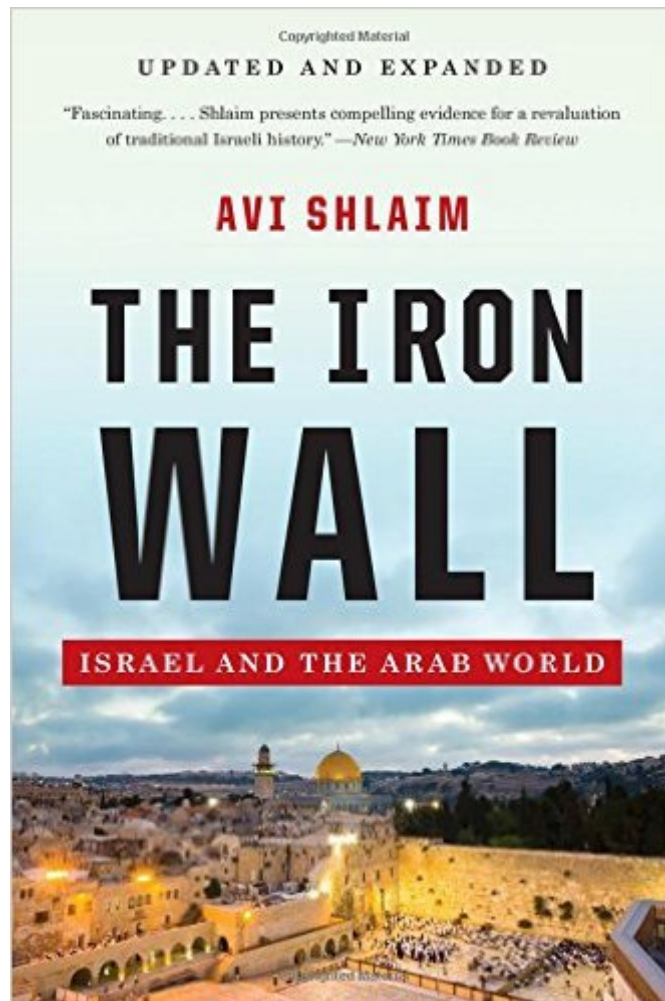


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The Iron Wall: Israel And The Arab World (Updated And Expanded)



Synopsis

“Fascinating. . . . Shlaim presents compelling evidence for a revaluation of traditional Israeli history.” —New York Times Book Review For this newly expanded edition, Avi Shlaim has added four chapters and an epilogue that address the prime ministerships from Barak to Netanyahu in the one book everyone should read for a concise history of Israel’s relations with Arabs (Independent). What was promulgated as an “iron-wall” strategy—building a position of unassailable strength—was meant to yield to a further stage where Israel would be strong enough to negotiate a satisfactory peace with its neighbors. The goal still remains elusive, if not even further away. This penetrating study brilliantly illuminates past progress and future prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Avi Shlaim has painstakingly gone through the Israeli state archives as well as the public record office in London and interviewed many prominent notables including Abba Eban, King Hussein, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and many other major players for this massive history of modern Israel and its relations with the Arab world. All of this massive research and inquiry has culminated in what is one of the most complete and compelling history books written about Israel.

Uncompromising in his inquiries, Shlaim addresses the problems that both sides faced during their struggles for supremacy in British Palestine. Starting with the Prologue, Shlaim begins with an interesting look at the early years of Zionism, which began as a nationalist movement in Europe.

Shlaim makes some good points regarding its birth as a response to European anti-Semitism and the inability of some Jewish groups to fully integrate into European society (many exceptions to this existed however). We get insights into all the major Zionist figures including Birnbaum, Herzl, Weizmann, Jabotinsky, and the mastermind himself, Ben-Gurion. The problems faced by the early Zionist movement can be summed in an interesting early statement from a fact-finding mission sent by Herzl, which stated [about Palestine], "The bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man." Meaning that the proposed land coveted by the Zionists already had a population of predominantly Arabic speaking peoples. Here begins the conflict that Shlaim writes about. Shlaim goes over the relentless and systematic approach of early Zionist leaders to court all the prominent leaders of the early 20th century by telling them what they wanted to hear.

The Arab-Israeli conflict has seemingly gone on forever and the problems seems intractable. The Iron Wall questions the conventional American view that the Israelis have always been the good guys. The book was written by Avi Shlaim an Israeli historian who is a professor at Oxford University. Shlaim's parents immigrated to Israel in 1951. He served in the Israeli Army in the 1960s and since then has pursued an academic career in England. Shlaim is often employed by the BBC as an expert on the conflict. Your attitude to this book will depend on your politics, Shlaim's views will probably appeal more to Europeans than Americans. The Iron Wall is well written and easy to read. It is also long at over 900 pages. The book starts in the 1890s when Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian journalist decided that the Jews should form their own state in Palestine. The European Jews who visited the region considered themselves superior to the peasant Arab farmers who occupied this backwater of the Ottoman Empire. Shlaim implies that they brought with them a colonialist mindset. He states that the Zionists believed it was important to befriend the great power of the day and they got into the habit of avoiding direct negotiation with the primitive Palestinians. Before 1945 this was Britain, and after 1945 it was the US. In 1917, Chaim Weizmann, a British citizen and government scientist, convinced the British foreign secretary to sign the Balfour Declaration. At that time the land belonged to Turkey and the Jews represented less than 10% of the population. Weizmann later became the first President of Israel. Shlaim argues that the only way to establish a state with an overwhelming Jewish majority in an area populated overwhelmingly by non-Jews was to expel the non-Jews.

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