

THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT:
A HISTORY

Fourth Edition

Now in its fourth edition, James L. Gelvin's award-winning account of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and their forebears offers a compelling, accessible, and current introduction for students and general readers. The book traces the struggle from the emergence of nationalism among the Jews of Europe and the Arab inhabitants of Ottoman Palestine through the present, exploring the external pressures and internal logic that have propelled it. Placing events in Palestine within the framework of global history, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: A History* skilfully interweaves biographical sketches, eyewitness accounts, poetry, fiction, and official documentation into its narrative. This updated edition features new material on the fate of the two-state solution during the Trump/Netanyahu era, alongside an updated and expanded glossary and suggestions for further reading.

James L. Gelvin is Professor of Modern Middle Eastern History at the University of California, Los Angeles. A specialist in the modern social and cultural history of the Arab East, he is author of *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (1998), *The Modern Middle East: A History* (2004), *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2012), and *The New Middle East: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2018). He is also editor of *The Contemporary Middle East in an Age of Upheaval* (2021) and co-editor of *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print, 1850–1930* (2013).

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A History

Fourth Edition

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PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

When I finished my graduate studies in 1992, Philip S. Khoury, one of my dissertation advisors, offered me a three-year contract teaching Middle Eastern history at his home institution, MIT, for which I remain grateful. Landing a permanent position before my contract ran out concerned me, of course, but it didn't weigh as heavily on my mind as it does on the minds of today's graduates. Unlike today, the job market in the early 1990s was good to historians, particularly those like me who specialized in modern Middle Eastern history. The Gulf War had just ended and the region remained in the headlines, in large measure because of the Israel-Palestine conflict. History departments took note.

The next year, I was having coffee with another of my dissertation advisors, Zachary Lockman. The Oslo Accord had just been signed. I remember turning to Zach and, referencing the job market, jokingly telling him, "You know – I'm really screwed if this [Oslo] thing works out." He looked at me and, without missing a beat, said, "I wouldn't worry about it."

Shortly thereafter, I attended a conference in San Antonio, Texas, which a member of the Israeli delegation to the Oslo talks was keynoting. When he spat on an American professor for no other reason than that she had presented a paper on Islamist perceptions of Israel, I knew that Zach was on to something.

As you will read, Oslo marked a turning point in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. All of a sudden, the conflict became about the principals – Israelis and Palestinians – and not about Israelis and Egyptians or Syrians, or Israelis and generic "Arabs."

I wanted Oslo to work, and there were times – in 1994, 2000, 2001 – when it appeared that it just might. But over the years it became

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

increasingly evident that it just wouldn't. In the book that follows, I underscore some of the reasons: spoilers on both sides; publics that grew disenchanting with waiting or with only half a loaf; politicians who never rose to the occasion by becoming statesmen; the imbalance in power and negotiating positions; the passing of a singular window of opportunity that, over time, diminished to a vanishing point.

Beginning around the same time as the last round of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in 2013–14, I began hearing the term “paradigm shift.” The first time I heard it, it was used to mean that the time might not be ripe for going for a full-fledged agreement. Instead, negotiators should focus on hitting singles, not home runs. Anything more would frustrate them, lead to even more bad blood between the two sides, and perhaps doom Oslo forever.

Over time, the phrase “paradigm shift” took on new meaning. By the time Donald Trump became president of the United States, it had come to mean abandoning the Oslo framework in its entirety. For Israel and the United States, maintaining the status quo was unobjectionable. And some diehards went even further, encouraging Israel and the United States to stop the endless rounds of negotiations, impose a settlement, and resolve the conflict on their own terms. How often over the years have we heard both Israelis and Palestinians bemoan the fact that “We have no partner for peace”?

That's where we are at now.

This is a troubling time to be a chronicler of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, I would like to thank everyone who assisted me in completing the fourth edition of this book. First off, there is Maria Marsh, my editor at CUP, and her assistant, Atifa Jiwa. Others who were instrumental in finalizing this edition include Mary Starkey and Rachel Norridge. Having authored, edited, and revised a number of books, I have to say this one was relatively painless, and I thank them for that.

Then there are my colleagues and my undergraduate and graduate students, with whom I have sometimes agreed, sometimes sparred, but from whom I have always learned. I am very much in their debt.

Finally, there are my critics. One could never find more scrupulous fact checkers.

AUTHOR'S NOTE TO PREVIOUS EDITIONS

This is a book about the creation, evolution, interaction, and mutual definition of two national communities. It is about the struggle between those two communities, the inner logic that has propelled that struggle, and the historical conditions that have delimited its course. If for no other reason than its persistence and its never-ending demand for attention, the Israeli-Palestinian struggle has earned its claim to uniqueness. By most other standards, however, it might be regarded as the quintessential struggle of the modern age. Either way, it is a story worth recounting.

Sometimes the struggle between the two national communities in Palestine has been submerged in wider struggles that embroiled outside powers. There was a time when it seemingly dropped off the radar screen altogether. For the forty-five years between 1948 and 1993, most of the world chose to regard the struggle for Palestine as an Arab-Israeli conflict, as if the claims of one of the principals in the struggle could be addressed by outside powers, or simply written off. With the hindsight of history, we now know better. The Arab-Israeli conflict was but a phase in a struggle that has come full circle, and no peace between Israel and its sovereign neighbors will bring the struggle to an end. Only the principals can do that.

I have written this book for students and general readers who wish to understand the broad sweep of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and situate it in its global context. The book is not, nor was it intended to be, encyclopedic. It is interpretive. It is also concise and, hopefully, engaging. If I have neglected or been too cavalier with your favorite hero, event, or peace plan, I apologize in advance. You might want to take consolation from the fact that I have honed the narrative

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you are about to read with care. You might also want to take consolation from the fact that, in return for the sacrifice of a few details, you are getting the occasional pearl. Where else are you going to find Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality slimmed down to a couple of paragraphs and written as if it were meant to be understood?

True believers on both sides of the struggle are, of course, beyond consolation. As you will soon see, I regard Zionism as a – perhaps the – prototypical nineteenth-century nationalist movement. I do not regard it as the fulfillment of Jewish history (as many of its adherents maintain), nor do I regard it as a “particularly virulent form of racism” (as its opponents have written). As a national movement, it is, to paraphrase Henry Fielding, no better than it should be. And yes, the word “Palestinian” does refer to a real nation, albeit one whose ancient lineage is as spurious as the ancient lineage of any other nation, and the word “Palestinian” can be used as a noun, not just as an adjective modifying the word “terrorist.” While it is the role of the true believer to believe, it is the role of the historian to treat the self-aggrandizing claims of any and all nationalist movements with skepticism. The same goes for the claims of their opponents. I only hope I have done so evenly and effectively.

Skeptics, like pioneers, get all the arrows. Thus, it is with a certain amount of trepidation that I list those who have contributed to my efforts. First off, there is Marigold Acland, my original editor at Cambridge University Press, who suggested I write this book even though I had stiffed her on another one. This is my penance. I also wish to thank others on the editorial side of this book: Eric Crahan, Isabelle Dambricourt, William M. Hammell, Pauline Ireland, Sarika Narula, and Sue Nicholas. Then there are those friends and colleagues who have read this or earlier versions of the book, made suggestions, or contributed in other ways: Carol Bakhos, David Dean Commins, Michael Cooperson, Roya Klaidman, Ussama Makdisi, David N. Myers, A. Rantin Polemick, Manal Quota, and Jihad Turk.

Finally, to this list I would like to add those undergraduates who read this book in its preliminary stages and graciously called my attention to every typo and misplaced comma, as well as those who raised questions that forced me to rewrite or rethink what I was trying to say. Once again, I wish to dedicate this book to them.