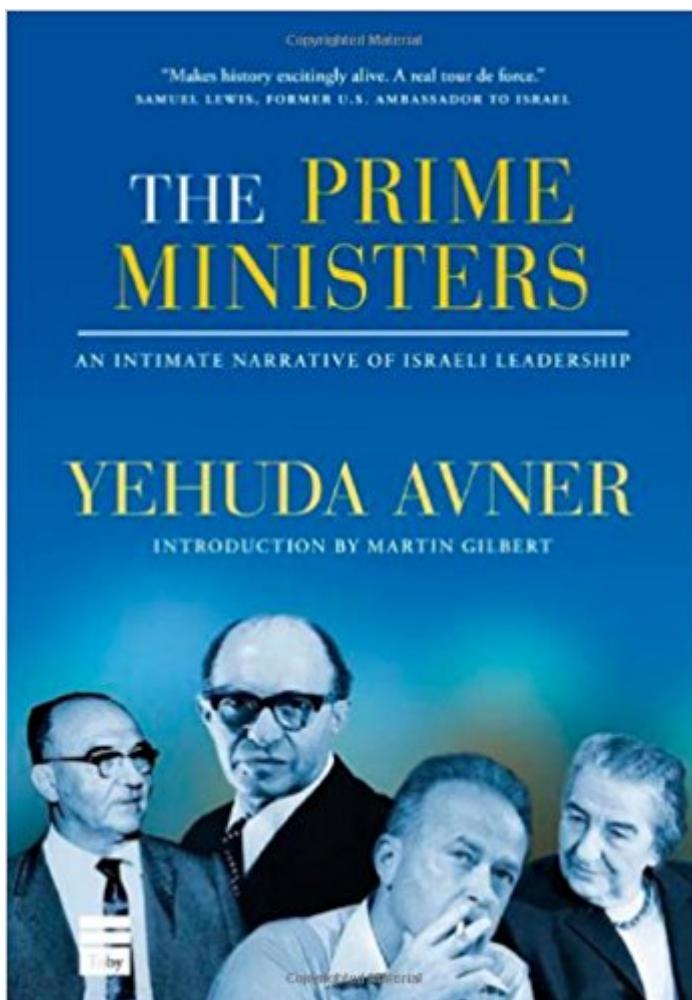


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The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative Of Israeli Leadership



Synopsis

The Prime Ministers is the first and only insider account of Israeli politics from the founding of the Jewish State to the near-present day. It reveals stunning details of life-and-death decision-making, top-secret military operations and high level peace negotiations. The Prime Ministers brings readers into the orbits of world figures, including Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Henry Kissinger, Yasser Arafat, Margaret Thatcher, Princess Diana and the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Written in a captivating literary style by a political adviser, speechwriter and diplomat, The Prime Ministers is an enthralling political memoir, and a precisely crafted prism through which to view current Middle East affairs. The Prime Ministers is the basis of a major documentary produced by Moriah Films, the Academy Award-winning film division of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Book Information

Hardcover: 715 pages

Publisher: The Toby Press, LLC; First Edition (US) First Printing edition (September 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1592642780

ISBN-13: 978-1592642786

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 2.2 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (333 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #108,331 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > War & Peace #85 inÂ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Middle East #115 inÂ Books > History > Middle East > Israel & Palestine

Customer Reviews

Yehuda Avner, a retired Israel Foreign Ministry official and former native of Manchester, has written a very readable behind-the-scenes account highlighting segments of his career, during which he came into working contact with five Israeli prime ministers and countless senior players in government. The book gives glimpses into the intricate workings of bureaucracy and the people who shaped history. The book is not an objective analysis of Israeli foreign policy, nor does it purport to be such. Rather, it provides insight into people and how they worked. Ariel Sharon had a keen military mind. Abba Eban was disliked by many and sometimes excluded from the flow of information and the decision-making process. Key documents provided by Israel "fell between the cracks" in the American less-than-amicable transition from the Carter presidency to that of Ronald

Reagan. Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat had a strong personal liking and trust for each other. Begin preferred to speak extemporaneously; Reagan used cue cards. There is, of course, considerable material concerning political events. Jimmy Carter put extreme pressure on Israel to accept an international conference to "solve" the problems of the Middle East, a move strongly opposed by the Begin administration. This was a reversal of Henry Kissinger's approach of an incremental peace stressing confidence-building measures. As pressure mounted and concerns about the Soviet role and PLO representation dominated discourse, the international conference proposed for Geneva became abruptly moot. Anwar Sadat buried the issue with his historic visit to Jerusalem and direct talks with Israel. Not that there were not theoretical concerns, which seem almost bizarre in retrospect. One senior military official contemplated the scenario of an armed attack on the entire Israeli cabinet as Sadat's plane landed at Ben Gurion Airport. Menachem Begin dismissed the concern, stating emphatically that he trusted Sadat. Avner makes one memorable remark concerning Begin, of whom it is eminently clear that he had the highest respect. He describes the satisfaction of this former "terrorist" wanted for murder by the British ... as he was received in 10 Downing Street. Avner also recounts how Begin lectured Carter that no one ever told the United States where its capital should be. Hence, no one will tell Israel where its capital is. Begin was straight forward to Carter, "Call it Jerusalem, D.C. --- Jerusalem, David's City." To the uninitiated it is almost comical how nuances of diplomatic protocol, down to the menu of a meal, determine the status of a visit. One point is very clear in the book --- Begin kept kosher. So does Avner. Appropriate meals were always provided for those requiring them, be it in London or in Washington. The kosher meals were always of an appearance as close as possible to the non-kosher food to avoid possible embarrassment or discomfort. (This reviewer knew the Orthodox rabbi who was in charge of kashering part of the White House kitchen for a Begin visit.) There are comments about other world leaders, although they are not the main thrust of the book. Avner was the Ambassador of Israel in London following the attempted assassination of Ambassador Shlomo Argov. At one point Avner sat in conversation with Margaret Thatcher, by then the former British Prime Minister. It was extremely surprising to read Thatcher's frank admission that she never really understood the death camp at Auschwitz and its atrocities until she was taken to Yad Vashem during an official visit to Israel. This well-written book is highly recommended. It is an eye-opener to people who made news and shaped world events, authored by someone with undisputed first-hand knowledge. It is by no means just another history book on the shelf.

This is undoubtedly one of the best non-fiction books of 2010 and arguably the very best. Reading

Avner's clear eloquent language and the manner in which he presents the dramas and dialogues, we are not surprised that Prime Minister after Prime Minister of different parties and different agendas requested that he be their speech and letter writer. Avner was present with Israeli and English Prime Ministers and American Presidents at crucial historic moments, taking notes, and he now offers his readers intimate behind the scene pictures of what actually happened and what was really said in Jerusalem, Washington, London, and other places. Avner describes famous personalities at their best moments and when they were flawed. People who think they know the history of the founding of the State of Israel and its relationships with the United States though the premiership of Menachem Begin will have their eyes opened. And those who consider Begin, the hero of this chronicle, a terrorist, will come to realize, as did Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, his arch enemy, that Begin was a brilliant and compassionate thinker and leader, and that he was the consummate gentleman even when he was in opposition to the government. We read, for example, how Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, a seemingly lackluster prime minister, was asked by several Israeli leaders to resign before the Six-Day War so that Ben-Gurion could take over and pursue and win the impending war, but he refused and readied the Israeli armed forces for the successful fight of its life. In contrast, the sympathetic Prime Minister Golda Meir, who inspired her people and who helped many African nation get on their feet by sending Israeli experts to aid them, was "totally ignorant of things military" and mishandled the onset of the Yom Kippur War. We hear the psychiatric evaluation of Henry (originally, Heinz) Kissinger by a psychiatrist who knew him well. Kissinger was profoundly affected by how he and his family were treated during the holocaust. "Outwardly, the secretary of state presented an image of self-assurance, strong will, and arrogance, Willie (the psychiatrist) went on. Inwardly, however, because of his suppressed emotions and state of denial, he was possessed of a deeply depressive disposition, an apocalyptic view of life, a tendency to paranoia, and an excessive sense of failure when things do not go his way. Typically, such inner doubts triggered displays of petulance, tantrums, and temper." People "like him invariably over-compensate," said the psychiatrist. Although raised as an Orthodox Jew, his neurosis causes people like him to "lean over backward in favor of the other side to prove they are being even-handed and objective." As a result, Kissinger caused Israel great harm. If President Nixon did not step in and order that the United States send Israel arms when they needed them during the Yom Kippur War, Kissinger would not have allowed them to be shipped and Israel would have been defeated. Even toward the end of the war, when Israel surrounded Egypt's Third Army and could have demanded an end to hostilities and a peace settlement as a condition for not destroying the army, Kissinger forced Israel to release these forces so that Egypt could claim that

they won the war. Thus, Kissinger destroyed an opportunity for peace resulting in many future deaths. But, Avner shows that although Nixon saved Israel, he was an anti-Semite. He called Kissinger "my Jew boy" to his face and took "perverse satisfaction in humiliating and taunting him with anti-Semitic slurs about how Jews put Israel's interests ahead of America's, and how cliquey they are, wielding far too much power because of their wealth, and too much influence because of their control of the media." Avner reveals the inside story of what occurred before the famous and heroic Entebbe Rescue. How Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin felt that he had to surrender to the terrorists' demands to release terrorist prisoners. To do otherwise, he felt, would mean the death of dozens of people. But, when a rescue seemed feasible, Rabin changed his mind. Avner describes many other governmental leaders. President Jimmy Carter is a very pious but profoundly uninformed man. He thought that he understood Israel, but his heavy-handed misguided manipulations in the Near East produced enormous problems. Also his current bad mouthing of Israel on every possible occasion misleads Arab nations to think that he is expressing American feelings and stifles the chance for a peace process. Prime Minister Begin irked Carter when he told him the story of how his father stood up to a Polish policeman who tried to cut off a rabbi's beard and how the police beat him for his heroism. "Mr. President, from that day forth I have forever remembered those two things about my youth: the persecution of our helpless Jews, and the courage of my father in defending their honor." President Ronald Reagan conducted one-on-one and group sessions with Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who he called Menakem, reading from a collection of cue cards. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher admitted after leaving office that she had no real understanding of the holocaust. Worse than Thatcher's ignorance was and still is the vicious anti-Semitism of the English upper class, so much so that Begin needed more protection in England than in any other friendly country. Avner also relates many humorous episodes such as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin needing to tell the wife of President Gerald Ford that while the president danced with his wife, he could not dance with her because he could not dance. During the celebration after Entebbe, when a benediction was made and others put on a yarmulke, Rabin could only find a starched handkerchief in his pocket, which he put on his head like a sheet of hard paper. The first time that the White House served the Israeli delegation a kosher meal was when Menachem Begin was prime minister. Before that time, when only Avner requested kosher food and when the White House was told that Avner could not eat non-kosher meat, they served him a pheasant. These are just a few examples of the large amount of revelations that Ambassador Avner offers his readers.

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