



Fortress Israel: The Inside Story of the Military Elite Who Run the Country--and Why They Can't Make Peace

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"Once in the military system, Israelis never fully exit," writes the prizewinning journalist Patrick Tyler in the prologue to *Fortress Israel*. "They carry the military identity for life, not just through service in the reserves until age forty-nine . . . but through lifelong expectations of loyalty and secrecy." The military *is* the country to a great extent, and peace will only come, Tyler argues, when Israel's military elite adopt it as the national strategy.

Fortress Israel is an epic portrayal of Israel's martial culture—of Sparta presenting itself as Athens. From Israel's founding in 1948, we see a leadership class engaged in an intense ideological struggle over whether to become the "light unto nations," as envisioned by the early Zionists, or to embrace an ideology of state militarism with the objective of expanding borders and exploiting the weaknesses of the Arabs. In his first decade as prime minister, David Ben-Gurion conceived of a militarized society, dominated by a powerful defense establishment and capable of defeating the Arabs in serial warfare over many decades. Bound by self-reliance and a stern resolve never to forget the Holocaust, Israel's military elite has prevailed in war but has also at times overpowered Israel's democracy. Tyler takes us inside the military culture of Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Ariel Sharon, and Benjamin Netanyahu, introducing us to generals who make decisions that trump those of elected leaders and who disdain diplomacy as appeasement or surrender.

Fortress Israel shows us how this martial culture envelops every family. Israeli youth go through three years of compulsory military service after high school, and acceptance into elite commando units or air force squadrons brings lasting prestige and a network for life. So ingrained is the martial outlook and identity, Tyler argues, that Israelis are missing opportunities to make peace even when it is possible to do so. "The Zionist movement had survived the onslaught of world wars, the Holocaust, and clashes of ideology," writes Tyler, "but in the modern era of statehood, Israel seemed incapable of fielding a generation of leaders who could adapt to the times, who were dedicated to ending . . . [Israel's] isolation, or to changing the paradigm of military preeminence."

Based on a vast array of sources, declassified documents, personal archives, and interviews across the spectrum of Israel's ruling class, *Fortress Israel* is a remarkable story of character, rivalry, conflict, and the competing impulses for war and for peace in the Middle East.

Fortress Israel: The Inside Story of the Military Elite Who Run the Country--and Why They Can't Make Peace Details

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From Reader Review Fortress Israel: The Inside Story of the Military Elite Who Run the Country--and Why They Can't Make Peace for online ebook

Ryan Young says

Please read this. Especially if you've ever considered calling yourself a Zionist, or are always telling people you want to carpet bomb the middle east.

Great history of the State of Israel as it progresses from embattled new nation to hyper military aggressor. War criminals vie with one another for premiership, peace processes and agreements are systematically ignored, hypocritical policies abound.

The Israeli Defense Forces and Mossad (Intelligence and Espionage ... Assassinations) are truly impressive organizations. Too bad that they are the only things that Israel ever employs for resolving international conflict.

Perhaps too focused - ignores anything to do with religious revival, economics, and other larger global trends. We hear nothing but conflict conflict, and while this is expected because of the premise of the book, it might be important to get a larger context.

Reads like a spy novel, full of declassified Mossad and IDF operations. Recommended for the information, even for those of you who are afraid of non-fiction.

Sudesh Katugampola says

Good read. Sometimes one wonders it is a bit overblown account of Israel's capability

Andrew says

The headlines over the past week have described an ongoing exchange of missiles between Israel and Hamas. It doesn't matter what day I wrote / posted this review – this isn't the first time something like this has occurred, and I doubt that there's anyone alive who believes it will be the last.

In “Fortress Israel”, Patrick Tyler reviews the history of the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors – and residents – going back to its founding in 1948. Readers who subscribe to the opinion that poor Israel is always getting picked on by those darned Arabs will probably hate this book. It makes a strong case that having geared up for a war mentality, the state and its leaders have a difficult time conceiving that there could be another option. It is important to stress that he presents a well documented argument that this stance applies to the government and not its citizens as a group.

Having read that previous paragraph, some potential readers that believe Israel is the devil incarnate sent to test the poor Arabs might rush out to grab this book, believing that they've finally found someone who

clearly and sympathetically describes their viewpoint to the masses. These people will also be disappointed, for Mr. Tyler does not claim that anyone else in the region is blameless – not Egypt, not Syria, not the PLO or any other group claiming, justifiably or not, to represent the Palestinian people.

This book is quite lengthy, documenting the events and decisions that led up to the various wars fought by Israel. However, the book does not spend much time documenting the actual wars themselves – fans of non-fiction war books will probably be disappointed.

In my opinion, anyone willing to approach the situation in the Middle East with an open mind, who do not subscribe to the stances produced by the propaganda experts on either side of this contentious situation, will find a lot to think about in this book. Even then, “agree with” is probably too much to expect for everything covered in this book. I suspect that Mr. Tyler would consider his efforts to be a success if someone read the book, thought about it, and then disagreed with everything he wrote – as long as the “thought about it” part was sincere.

RATING: A solid 4 stars, and I was sincerely tempted to toss in an extra 1/2 star.

DISCLOSURE: I won this book in a contest; winners were encouraged to review the book, but there was no requirement to do so (nor, of course, was there any attempt to influence the rating).

Kyle says

A fine look at the politico-military ideologies that have pervaded the Israeli government basically from its inception. It is indeed a top-heavy approach, favoring ministers and officers over all other players, but in that heft is a necessary density that mostly makes up for the one-sided approach. Also evident is a pro-peace, hindsight-laden cynicism toward Israel, though, especially through the depictions of the various leaders, this point of view comes across as appropriate, if for no other reason than to underscore the narrative of the work as a whole: that rampant militarism and a lack of gumption for peace has led Israel to its current wobbly geopolitical position, particularly in the Middle East. Still, there's more to societies than voting records would bear out, and I feel that could have enhanced Tyler's overall message a bit. In the end, though, this is a sobering reminder of the perils of ideological fervor and quagmire, especially when they fly in the face of harsh realities.

Christine says

I received a free copy of this book through Goodreads Giveaways.

I found Fortress Israel to be a very detailed look at Israel's history, which I enjoyed very much. I didn't really know too much about the early history of Israel as a country and this went very deeply into that, from the very beginning to almost present day.

My problem with this book is, and you can actually tell by the title, that it is a very biased look into this history. It's written to put Israel's leadership in the worst light possible, so some of the situations are spun in such a way that you can't necessarily trust the way the author read into it. He is an expert on the area and the

history, but the personal bias feels very think in some spots.

So a really well researched and well documented look into the history of Israel, but take some of the negative spin with a grain of salt and read some other books to get the real picture.

Justin says

I broadly agree with Tyler's thesis that Israel is hindered in its pursuit of a lasting peace by the strength of the military culture established by Ben Gurion et al. I had two problems with the book; the Sparta analogy is horribly laboured and there is no serious attempt made to understand behaviour that does not support the thesis. Rabin, for example, is presented, quite rightly, as a stalwart of the military establishment; however Tyler does not provide any real insight into why he was also keen to begin the Oslo process. This simplistic approach leads to most of the key players appearing cartoonish (Peres is arrogant and snobbish, Barak is ignorant, Sharon is a monster, Olmert is useless). I felt that any human complexity was removed. That said, the book is good but needs to be read alongside other works on the Israel/Palestine problem to get the full picture.

Noah W says

The book begins with motorcycle-borne Mossad assassins racing through the crowded streets of Tehran targeting Iranian nuclear scientists.

In the following pages, the script switches to biographical sketches of the Israeli prime ministers and their engagement in the Middle East conflict. *Sabra*, a tough cactus, is the title ascribed to the rough and tumble military elite who have guarded this narrow strip of land since 1948; *sabra* captures the mindset of the Israelis and their aggressive approach to defending their nation.

Much of the book goes into the delicate relationship that Israel maintain with the United States and this segment alone warrants reading the book. There is also a short section that discusses the Shi'a Muslim mindset and the impact of this worldview.

Tobias says

An excellent account of modern Israeli strategic thinking that shows the militaristic mental trap that Israel's leaders are in collectively that makes it very difficult for them to make peace with the Palestinians. It shows how this trap developed especially from 1955 when Moshe Sharett Israel's second Prime Minister was overwhelmed a military faction within his government backed by his predecessor David Ben Gurion.

It shows how this trap has caused Israel's leaders to miss many chances to make peace and has led to repeated futile attempts to impose a military solution on a political problem.

Rhuff says

Patrick Tyler has reviewed the entire history of Israel under a military lens. In doing so he's focused on the key dilemma for the State of Israel in coexisting with its neighbors: that a military force needs enemies to justify institutional power; that these must be provoked, if not exactly invented; and that survival of a military establishment is always equated with the survival of the nation it "serves." In doing so Israel has gone from the Zionist premise of secular Messiah to self-inflicted ghetto state; a deep and unrecognized irony as it now walls itself in the footsteps of old South Africa.

Tyler's concluding premise has it that Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Rabin, and other founders had a vision of integration with the larger Semitic world; a premise betrayed by the second and third generations following. But his own leader-by-leader survey of Israel's state and military policy belies this hopeful assertion that Israel has "lost its way." The trajectory seemed pretty well set from the start, with the "original sin" of Arab expulsion in Palestine, compounded by the Occupation and the spread of war to Lebanon. Israel has never accepted the neighborhood it moved into and lives in, continuing to see itself as a "nation apart". Its political and military leaders seem to consistently revel in the ensuing rejection, with peace offers as a disarming strategy to be pulled out and played at strategic moments.

Tyler mentions but does not dwell on how American life support has empowered this rejectionist stance, concentrating on Israel's internal military-political dynamics; for if truly left to its own devices Israel would have been forced to see peace more than war as necessary to its survival. Yet as long as Washington foots its bill and "guarantees" its security, Israel's war machine can project force to zany extremes of apocalyptic rhetoric and brutal invasions.

What's the end in sight? Unfortunately this is not a structured work of fiction, with a morally redemptive conclusion. Israel has bought time for seventy years. Yet Scripture teaches that a "man's life is fourscore and ten." Living longer takes recognition of one's age, its limits, and healthy precautions, not pipedreams of past glory. The call to make Israel great again finds echoes in its military sponsor, as the Israelization of American society - at this writing - also finds reflection in walls, threats, xenophobia, and missile-launched backstabbing.

Tom Aves says

O Izraelu lubi? czyta? ze wzgl?du na determinacj? ludzi, kórz? yj? w sumie w wi?kszo?ci na pustyni, broni? si? przed ekstremizmami, chocia? sami te? podchodz? do wielu spraw ekstremalnie. Maj?c za sob? niemal godzinne "przes?uchanie" i "rewizj?" na granicy z Egiptem doceniam s?u?by mundurowe, wojsko, Mosad i ludzi, którzy walcz? o swój kraj. Ksi??ka ciekawie pokazuje kulisy wojskowego lobby w Izraelu, rozgrywki polityczne i szpiegowskie. Bez wychwalania, krytycznie i obiektywnie

Phillip Jones says

Mr. Tyler is a good writer, making his book easy to read. Also, the book provides in a single volume a history of Israeli strategic security thinking and, as such, is informative. However, Mr. Tyler is so biased and so dedicated to the idea that every problem in the Middle East is the fault of an Israeli military perspective, that a reader cannot honestly trust his work. Unfortunately, this conclusion takes priority over the evidence,

such that the book apparently conjures the private thoughts of various characters, lacks end notes, and actually contradicts itself practically on the same page. The most glaring effort by Mr. Taylor to blame Isreal is a tortured analogy to Sparta that he wheels out at odd points.

Perhaps Mr. Tyler was attempting to compensate for a perceived bias towards Israel. Unfortunately, because of his one-sided narrative, he fails at a reasonable counter-argument.

Jeevan Jeyaratnam says

Fantastically entertaining read, chronicling the history of the Israeli state and helping understand why there is still no end in sight to this conflict. The book doesn't try to offer answers where none are possible but relays the stark stubborn streak inbred throughout the Israeli military elite.

Well worth a read for anyone who enjoys modern history and the middle eastern riddle. While the viewpoint has angered many Israeli academics the extensive source material used suggests the book isn't far from the mark.

Highly recommended

Paul Bard says

Just. Unbelievably. Bad.

Not factually, historically, socially, nor linguistically correct, this is a truly excremental hack work devoted solely to smearing the good repute of a noble people.

Lynn says

What's past is prologue. Putin by another name is poised to take over countries from the old USSR. Narrative takes us back 30 years to a young Jack Ryan, Sr. in the Cold War and current days with Jack Ryan, Jr. in the field and Jack Ryan, Sr. in the White House. A good last book in the series, please!

William says

overlong and with too many biographical digressions and probably a little too much conjecture but overall an excellent history of Israel as a brutal and deeply arrogant (in the American sense) military state.
