



# Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer

*Phyllis Bennis*

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If you have ever wondered "Why is there so much violence in the Middle East?," "Who are the Palestinians anyway?," "What are the occupied territories?" or "What does Israel want?," then this is the book for you. With straightforward language, Phyllis Bennis, longtime analyst of the region, answers basic questions about Israel and Israelis, Palestine and Palestinians, the US and the Middle East, Zionism and anti-Semitism; about complex issues ranging from the Oslo peace process to the election of Hamas. Together her answers provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-standing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

## **Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer Details**

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# From Reader Review Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer for online ebook

## Pearl says

I picked up this little book at a sale table for under \$5. Although I thought I was beyond needing a "primer" on this topic, the price was right and, thumbing through it, I liked the way it was organized.

Bennis explains the complex history between the Israelis and the Palestinians through a series of questions, which she poses and then answers. The question and answer format provides a quick way to reference the issues and breaks down the complexity of most of the problems into easily digestible chunks. It also makes the book somewhat repetitive and allows Bennis to frame the questions and to choose which questions she will ask.

For such a small book, I found it to be quite comprehensive, although it doesn't deal with the most recent events, having been published in 2007. In the first section, Bennis deals with such basic questions as "Who are the Palestinians"? Why are Palestinians in Israel at all?" Who are the Israelis?" Where did they come from?" to the more difficult ones, "What do the Palestinians want?" "What does Israel want?" Why are Israeli settlements located outside Israel's borders"? "If Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, why are so many Palestinians in the eastern part of the city?" These are just examples, not a comprehensive list of the topics covered.

In the other four sections, Bennis turns to what role the U.S. and the other Arab countries have in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, what international law and the Geneva Convention have ruled concerning the conflict and disputed borders, the Oslo Peace Process and the Camp David Accords and why they failed, and much more. Bennis uses UN Resolution 242, in particular, and Articles of the Geneva Convention to show time after time that Israel is in direct violation of international law on a variety of fronts, most particularly in its continued occupation of the West Bank and continued expansion there. She also clearly and compelling traces how much the land that the Palestinians are now trying to hang on to has diminished from the UN partition in 1947.

Bennis has written widely on US foreign policy and is a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington DC, an institute some would refer to as left-wing. And Bennis clearly has a bias but for too long the bias has been on the Israeli side and I'm sympathetic with Bennis for championing the cause of a neglected and infringed upon people against a rich, very powerful nation protected and funded by the world's most powerful nation. I don't think what Bennis writes is inaccurate; it's what she chose to leave out some might find fault with. Nevertheless I liked this book a lot and would recommend it to anyone wanting a basic grasp on the history of the Palestinian-Israel conflict. I'd have given the book another star, if Bennis had called it "A Perspective," (hers) rather than "A Primer."

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## Lauren says

This is a much more one-sided book than I had anticipated. Disappointing.

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## **Cathe Liang says**

I found this book disappointing as there is nothing new and more importantly, it is excessively biased. I said it not because of some specific stance the author took, but of the way too subjective sentences throughout the book without any quotations or evidence backing up (such a ridiculous taboo in journalistic writing).

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## **Trish says**

This short handbook can be read in an evening. It really is hand-sized, fitting in the palm. The language in it is so clear, it could be written for a non-English speaker or a school child. It was published in 2007. This subject is so fraught with emotion and intention it is difficult to just get the facts. In fact, this conflict may be the perfect place to begin to understand how "facts" are slippery things. Bennis has an opinion, but she is very good at tamping down the rhetoric and writing quietly.

If you have read any of Bennis' other works, you will find she tries to answer the most pressing questions people have first. That is, she will try to simply explain why there is fighting, or why suicide bombers appear on only side in the conflict. Her answers will raise more questions, which she tries to answer by going broader in the region and deeper into history. It is an organic method of setting out the issues and has the value of always providing at least a partial answer before we become overloaded with detail. The added benefit is that the questions can be listed, as they are in her handbook, as the *Table of Contents*.

Bennis' work is an important addition to the material one will need to read to get some measure of the size and depth and rightness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It's almost seventy years since Israel was founded. The generation involved in the creation of Israel is dead now. The generation that came after, that built Israel, is nearly gone. We can make judgments now about what those first generations have left us.

Bennis herself is an American Jew. In her youth she was a Zionist, until she actually began to see what happened, what was happening, in the area of land now called Israel. To her credit, she could tell that what she'd learned, and what she was hearing, did not correspond to what she could see with her eyes. When she investigated, she discovered she could make up her own mind about the conflict. Her discussion on C-Span about the origins of ISIS includes, towards the end, a discussion of how she came to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some people may not like the facts, and some people may like to put their own gloss on the facts, but if we just *look at the facts, and the situation on the ground* in Israel and (what as yet is not quite) the promised Palestine, I think everyone would agree there is something seriously amiss here.

What the Israelis are doing is illegal. It is immoral, too, but lots of people do immoral things and we can't stop them. The International Court of Justice in the Hague, however, ruled in 2003 that the Wall Israel constructed in the West Bank, ostensibly for its own protection and beginning in 2002, is illegal. It cuts off fifteen percent of West Bank land from the West Bank and puts tens of thousands of Palestinians on the Israeli side of the Wall, among other things. Why hasn't this been addressed in the 12 years since it was constructed?

"The International Court...stated directly that other countries have their own responsibility to pressure Israel to comply with the court's opinion...The US government quietly criticized the Wall early in its process of construction, but soon dropped the critique and agreed, in direct violation of the Court's ruling on the obligation of other states, to pay Israel almost \$50 million—taken out of the \$200 million the US provided in humanitarian support to Palestinian

NGOs—to construct checkpoints and gates in the Wall."

Harvard University's Shorenstein Center has an online Journalist's Resource from which I gathered the following information:

Since it was founded in 1948, Israel has become the largest single recipient of US foreign assistance — a total of \$121 billion, almost all of which has been in the form of military assistance. - See more at: (<http://journalistsresource.org/studie...>)

Why aren't we tying assistance to compliance with the law? I can't figure it out. I know that wealthy Jewish donors in the US skew the political process by pressuring candidates to vote sympathetically to their issues by giving them generous campaign donations, and by buying up media sites that send out constant self-serving messages. Is it really that bald? Money? Power? Influence? Geez. Talk about a morality deficit.

Since the history recounted in this short book, the United Nations has granted non-member observer state status on Palestine, and now allows the Palestinian flag to fly at the U.N. These steps were taken despite the U.S. and U.S. allies voting "no" on the resolutions. This book will tell you why this has happened.

It is difficult for even a well-read American to separate truth from falsehood in the history we learned in school and from our own government these past sixty-odd years. We only hear the Israeli voice; Palestine has been almost erased, her people silenced. It takes real dedication for anyone to understand why, in this modern era, millions of people would be forced from their land with no compensation, and then, gradually, over time, lose rights to even the small amount of land they had left from their own holdings.

I feel quite sure that things could have been handled differently at many turns over the years. I wonder how Israelis think their occupation of Palestinian land will end. Does their government think they are going to protect Israelis from harm by this method? Is this the way to live in the world? Americans can hardly claim the high road by their treatment of minority classes in their own country. I think we are seeing how that's working out in real time.

I am forming an opinion, and it is not what I learned growing up.

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### **Rachell says**

I was very disappointed with this book. The title is misleading -- this will not lead to understanding the conflict, only a one-sided view and anti-Israel bias. The author plainly ignores the other side of the issue.

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### **Marianne says**

A short booklet to give a reader an overview of a complicated mess. I recommend it to anyone interested in learning a bit about the struggles between Palestine and Israel. It will give you a basic understanding. This was written in 2002. I would love to see an update.

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### **John says**

A very one-sided (i.e. anti-Israeli) position paper with no nuance to its analysis. This reads as if it were commissioned by the UN.

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### **Modern Times Bookstore says**

Provides a great introductory overview of the major political issues at stake. It is framed through a lens of Israeli colonization of Palestine. Very accessible, with good politics. Helpful for talking points.

-Becca

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### **Grace Harrington says**

I really enjoy the question answer format of this book. Although it is very pro Palestinian, it gives a very accurate and fact full perspective on how the conference has been shipped. The set up provides an easy way to read and understand for those who don't know the conflict

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### **Bill says**

An excellent outline of one of the most significant conflicts in the world. The only thing that keeps this book from a 5 is the author's heavy pro-Palestinian bia -- a bias I share by the way

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### **Pamela says**

A better title would be "Understanding ONE SIDE of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict." Enough said.

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### **Diana says**

I learned some new perspectives reading this book, however, I found it repetitive and the pro-Palestinian bias too strong.

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### **Sven says**

A succinct, clear, and amazingly informative view of the longest running occupation and conflict in the modern world. The book presents questions and answers that many Americans need to ask.

The author indicts all parties for the violence and distrust, but emphasizes that the Israelis have the money, the firepower, and above all, the backing of the United States, versus the Palestinians who have very little power, influence, or finances.

The book is forward looking as well - offering a realistic model of a two state solution at the end, acknowledging that getting to a just peace will not be easy, but it is doable.

Read this book if you have any concerns about the people on both sides of this 60+ year-old conflict, and discuss with your friends, family, and our representatives.

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### **David says**

I chose this book because it caught my eye passing through the halls of the library. I thought it'd be a simple, neutral explanation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, I was disappointed when Bennis quickly assumed a political stance and her anti-Israel bias was persistent throughout the entire book. One thing that I did like was her Question and Answer way of writing; it made her information easy to follow, and at the same time it allowed her to more easily inject her opinion because she chose what she wanted her reader to know. Her journalistic style was interesting, but her information was at times really overwhelming and made me tune out at times. Bennis refers to events between the creation of Israel to the present back and forth which can throw the reader off. Still, I think there are better options to read that explain Israel and Palestine than this book.

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### **Ryan says**

So far I have learned that Palestinians have not been given a fair look by most Americans.

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