



The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities

Simha Flapan

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In this ground-breaking and controversial history of the founding of Israel, noted Israeli scholar and peace activist Simha Flapan gives us the first true account of one of the most momentous political events of the century. The official story is well known: the Zionists welcomed the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state; the Arabs rejected partition and launched a war to drive the Jews into the sea; the Palestinians fled Israel despite the efforts of Jewish leaders to get them to stay; after Israel's miraculous victory in 1948, its hand was extended in peace, but not a single Arab leader responded. The Birth of Israel exposes these "historical truths" as propaganda myths that have misguided Israeli policy to this day. Drawing on recently declassified material - from David Ben Gurion's war diaries to the minutes of secret meetings - Flapan reconstructs the real events of that critical time. He demonstrates that the Zionist leadership accepted partition purely as a tactical strategy, that their intention was always to establish a homogeneous Jewish homeland in most, if not all, of Palestine. Flapan shows, furthermore, how these objectives shaped Israeli actions: their expulsion of the Palestinians, their exploitation of the 1948 war for territorial gain, and their refusal to make any concessions that might have brought about accommodation. Flapan's lucid analysis sheds light on the figures and events of that time: Ben-Gurion emerges as Begin's forerunner, the "just" war of 1948 as the precursor of the debacle in Lebanon. Eye-opening and bold, full of unsettling revelations, The Birth of Israel offers fresh hope for understanding the tragic Arab-Israeli stalemate, and for moving towards a solution.

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One of the books, "The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities" by Simha Flapan, is viewed by Middle East specialists here as militantly anti-Zionist, a book designed to erode one of the major Western perceptions of the Israeli-Arab conflict - the notion that Israel has always held itself to a higher moral standard than its neighbors did. "It was a complex human situation," Mr. Pipes said of the birth of Israel. "Mistakes, evil and virtue existed on both sides, though perhaps not in equal proportion." "All this interest in the 1948 period," Mr. Pipes said, "is due to the fact that the Arab-Israeli conflict has gone back to where it was."