

## ★ **The Last Palestinian: The Rise and Reign of Mahmoud Abbas**

**Grant Rumley**

**Amir Tibon**

Prometheus Books (Jul 11, 2017)

Hardcover \$24.00 (336pp)

978-1-63388-299-7

*Rumley and Tibon make the complexities of the Middle East accessible for those who have little background within this political cauldron.*

Grant Rumley, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and Amir Tibon, an Israeli journalist who covered Israeli-Palestinian relations for Walla News, present a political biography of Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority's complex and ultimately tragic president. More than seventy interviews and numerous off-the-record conversations reveal Abbas's strengths and weaknesses throughout this absorbing account.

Abbas's childhood in Palestine and Syria and his personal life receive little attention. The book instead focuses on his role as a negotiator, diplomat, and statesman. Abbas hammered out the details of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords that were signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO President Yasser Arafat, which included limited self-rule for the Palestinians.

Unfortunately, Rabin was assassinated before the plan could be put into action. In 2005, Abbas was elected president to replace the recently deceased Arafat. The book shows that Abbas soon became a captive of Palestinian politics, as his Fatah faction was upset in 2006 parliamentary elections by the terrorist group Hamas. Abbas never recovered from this political catastrophe, and his power was permanently weakened by Hamas, whose members view Abbas as a dupe of the Israelis.

The book argues that Abbas's well-intended goals of ending the second Intifada, which brought death and destruction to the West Bank, and of renewing the peace process were dashed by Hamas, as well as by right-wing Israeli parties that were opposed to compromise. The Obama administration also proves disappointing in this account, which shows how peace talks led by Secretary of State John Kerry collapsed. As it demonstrates, Abbas had neither the political savvy nor the public support to change their course.

Now in his eighties and suffering from heart disease, Abbas has failed to groom a successor. The book asserts that Abbas has lost touch with Palestinians and that his bleak legacy includes embattled parties and little chance for peace with Israel. Sadly, the authors ponder that Abbas might be the "last Palestinian leader."

Rumley and Tibon make the complexities of the Middle East accessible for those who have little background within this political cauldron. This is an excellent choice for public libraries and an important work for international relations specialists.

KARL HELICHER (July/August 2017)

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