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Author: Christopher J. Bolan
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Main content

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Quicksand: America's Pursuit of Power in the Middle East

by Geoffrey Wawro


612 pages

$37.95

Quicksand is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of America's involvement with the Middle East. Wawro's academic background in military history and practical experience teaching at the Naval War College come through with force in a style that will particularly appeal to military professionals.

The first third of Quicksand is especially enlightening as Wawro offers a fresh historical perspective informed by his meticulous research of military and diplomatic archives in the United States and London. This compelling narrative begins with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and it is perceptively written from the perspective of key American and British policymakers. This is the best part of the book and will prove beneficial to scholars, students, and foreign policy practitioners alike. These first five chapters effectively chart America's deepening relationship with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt--countries that have frequently occupied center stage in American regional strategies.

The author's two chapters on Israel tell the tragic story of Britain's ultimately irreconcilable promises to the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine. Wawro casts blame directly on British and American leaders for pursuing shortsighted strategies that left the problem of Palestine "insoluble" while providing "no practical means to intervene in Palestine and keep the peace between Jews and Arabs." At the same time, Wawro does not shy away from criticizing both Jewish and Arab leaders for their unwillingness to accept compromise, their...