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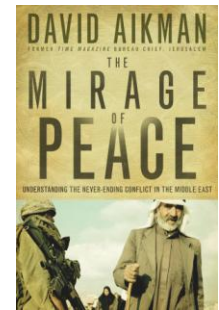
Contact: Ben Laurro, Pure Publicity
818.753.4056 or Ben@purepublicity.com

UNTANGLING THE WEB OF MIDDLE EAST PASSIONS

Former *TIME* magazine Jerusalem bureau chief looks beyond the Israel - Palestine divide

Washington, DC – The Middle East is more than a nightly news story. Events in the region directly affect every American: from terrorist threats, to military action, to the price of a gallon of gas.

“Understanding the region and its conflicts is no longer a luxury,” says **David Aikman**, author of *The Mirage of Peace: Understanding the Never-Ending Conflict in the Middle East*, one of the few comprehensive and unbiased resources on the Middle East. He points out that oil is not the region’s only export. Radical Islamists want “Islam [to] conquer Rome and all Europe... and not necessarily through war.”



For many Americans, the political and religious factors can be overwhelmingly complex. Debates over U.S. foreign policy in the region all too often devolve into shouting matches between the blindly pro-Israel and uncritically pro-Palestinian camps.

Aikman, a former Jerusalem bureau chief for *TIME* magazine, offers a balanced look at the countries and players who drive the headlines. His primer gives readers an understanding of the personalities, relationships and web of complicated loyalties behind the thorny issues that have defied all attempts to bring a lasting peace to the region. “The value of this book is that it gives the reader the background information that is missing in the daily news, so that even a non-expert can take an informed position on events in the Middle East,” Aikman says. Chapter summaries for *The Mirage of Peace* include:

Israel and Palestine: “The Arab-Israeli dispute is the world’s longest-lasting, most incurable and most festering cold sore, to put it bluntly.” In this chapter, *The Mirage of Peace* covers:

- The roots of Zionism and Palestinian identity.
- Israel’s War of Independence, the Six-Day War, and the Yom Kippur War.
- Palestinian nationalism: secular (PLO) vs. Islamist (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah).
- Israel: underdog or regional bully?
- Peace efforts (Oslo Accords, the Road Map), Intifadeh, and Palestinian statehood.

Syria and Lebanon: “Syria is a totalitarian Stalinist autocracy.... Lebanon is a cosmopolitan, sophisticated and parliamentary democracy state.... The only problem for little Lebanon is that its neighbor has dominated its political life for several decades.” This chapter explains:

- How Ottoman politics preserved a stew of ethnic and religious communities.
- French influence in post-Ottoman Syria.
- Lebanon’s power-sharing among Sunni, Shiite and Christian factions.
- The Alawite roots of Syria’s ruling Assad dynasty.
- The Ba’ath Party, the Muslim Brotherhood, the PLO and Hezbollah.
- Syrian interventions in Lebanon.

Egypt and Jordan: “Egypt is the 800-pound gorilla of the Arab world.... [Yet] no country in the Middle East has more successfully navigated its way through thickets of war, civil war, assassination and betrayal than Jordan.” This chapter of *The Mirage of Peace* introduces:

- The historical roots of Egypt’s conflicted (non-Arab) identity, politics and culture.
- Egypt’s defenders, occupiers, the Muhammad Ali dynasty, and the British.
- Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak and the tension between autocracy and Islamism.
- Egypt’s daring ties with the West.
- The Abdullah dynasty of Jordan: pro-Western yet defiantly Arab.

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- Jordan's wars with both Israel and the PLO, and bridge-building with the West.

The Persian (but really Arabian) Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen are an Arab anomaly: "Small, well-governed kingdoms... but better integrated into the business and cultural affairs of the modern world than republics like those of Egypt or Syria that have existed far longer."

Iraq: "Iraq would be a major player on the Middle East scene regardless of who ruled it." In this chapter, *The Mirage of Peace* covers:

- The "cradle of civilization," incubator for writing, law, philosophy, science and medicine.
- British control, Saddam, and beyond.
- Oil, ideology and war. Sunni control, Iranian Shiite threat, Kurdish rebellion.
- The shell game of Weapons of Mass Destruction.
- Overview of the American and Coalition invasions.
- The hard road from insurgency to political sovereignty.

Iran: "Americans in general don't think of themselves as having done anything harmful to Iran, but this country, more than most, has a memory for slights, both perceived and real." This chapter of *The Mirage of Peace* looks at:

- Persian contributions to Indo-European languages, Jewish liberation, science, medicine.
- The incubator of Shia Islam.
- Modern Iran: the Anglo-Russian agreement, Shah Khan, and Ayatollah Khatami.
- Oil, the CIA, and the Islamic revolution.
- Ahmadinejad, anti-Western policy, and pro-American dissent.

Saudi Arabia and Beyond: "In religious views, and internal politics, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia are as different from each other as a camel from a king penguin. Yet...they have been thrown together by fate and forced to coexist out of reasons of the need for mutual survival." The final chapter of *The Mirage of Peace* covers:

- Early Mecca and the life of Mohammed.
- The birthplace of Islam—and Arab-Muslim power.
- The House of Saud and the discovery of oil.
- The rise of Jihadism and Osama bin Laden.
- Sudanese instability and radicalism.

The Mirage of Peace also explores the Arab-Israeli dispute, the basic goals of Zionism -- Israel's desire to be a Jewish state and live at peace with its neighbors and yet sensitive to the concerns of Palestinians.

David Aikman is an award-winning print and broadcast journalist, a bestselling author and a foreign policy commentator. His wide-ranging professional achievements include a 23-year career at *TIME* magazine, for which he reported on nearly all major historical events during that time. More recently, he is the author of 10 books including an analytical biography of Billy Graham, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence*, and the ground-breaking *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*. He is a professor of history at Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia, where he also coaches young writers. For more insights into political and religious issues, visit www.davidaikman.com.

About *The Mirage of Peace*:

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The Mirage of Peace: Understanding the Never-Ending Conflict in the Middle East by David Aikman. Published by Gospel Light Publications/Regal Books. October 2009. Hardcover, 287 pages. \$22.99. ISBN: 9780830746057.

Suggested Interview Questions For David Aikman, author of *The Mirage of Peace*

1. What can ordinary Americans do to promote peace in the Middle East?
2. What are the consequences for the U.S.—and the world—if we do nothing?
3. Does the word “mirage” suggest pessimism about the chances for peace?
4. Explain the detrimental effect of “chronic media oversimplification” of the conflict?
5. What is the problem with most books by academic experts on the Middle East?
6. What, or who, has been the biggest influence on your thinking about the Middle East?
7. How do you balance a journalist’s mind and a believer’s heart?
8. Why should people listen to an avowed Christian on this religiously divisive topic?
9. Discuss radical Islamists vs. moderate Muslims.
10. Is it possible to have a unified Jerusalem? Can Jews, Christians and Muslims peacefully share the city?
11. What problems might Palestinian statehood solve?
12. Given that America’s closest regional allies are a kingdom (Jordan) and an autocracy (Egypt), how important is democracy in the region? Can it work?
13. What happens to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Gulf states when the oil runs out?
14. How might Western democracies engage with hostile regimes like that of Syria?
15. How are Americans perceived by ordinary citizens of these countries?
16. Why is a background knowledge of the history of the region so important?
17. In your view, what is usually missing in other books that are published on the Middle East? (Answer, not balanced and not comprehensive and lacking any historical background)
18. Why does religion have such an important role in understanding the problems of the region?

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