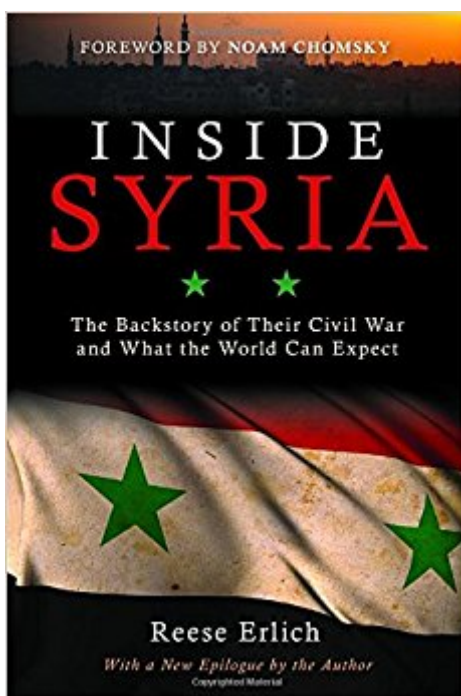


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Inside Syria: The Backstory Of Their Civil War And What The World Can Expect



Synopsis

Based on firsthand reporting from Syria and throughout the Middle East, *Inside Syria* unravels the complex dynamics underlying the Syrian Civil War. Through vivid, on-the-ground accounts and interviews with rebel leaders, regime supporters, and Syrian president Bashar al-Assad himself, veteran journalist Reese Erlich gives the reader a better understanding of this momentous power struggle and why it matters. Through his many contacts inside Syria, the author reveals who is supporting Assad and why, describes the agendas of the rebel factions, and depicts in stark terms the dire plight of many ordinary Syrian people caught in the cross fire. Erlich explains how, after colonization by the British and the French and later becoming a focal point of political intrigue by numerous international powers, the region became increasingly volatile and dangerous. He also provides insights into both the past and the present roles of the Kurds, the continuing influence of Iran, and the policies of American administrations that seem interested only in protecting US regional interests, even at the expense of innocent Syrian civilians. Disturbing, compelling, and enlightening, this timely book--now with a new epilogue with the latest information--shows not only what is happening inside Syria but why it is so important for the Middle East, the United States, and the world.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Prometheus Books; Reprint edition (September 20, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1633882357

ISBN-13: 978-1633882355

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 38 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #391,880 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #45 in Books > History > Middle East > Syria #767 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Middle Eastern #876 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Security

Customer Reviews

"Erlich clearly and succinctly explains Syria's current political and military stalemate in this important, informative, and well researched book.... Essential reading for anyone interested in

understanding the current turmoil in the Middle East." Publishers Weekly **STARRED REVIEW** "Reese Erlich takes you Inside Syria with the kind of clarity that only a superb journalist can provide. This book is a tour de force, demolishing clichés and replacing them with realities of what the hell is going on in Syria and why. The result is a gripping narrative that combines unvarnished history with immediate truth about Syria's present-day. Norman Solomon, author of *War Made Easy* "A deeply readable and informative book that is particularly wise about the economic undercurrents beneath what more-superficial writers see merely as political or religious tensions. A fine introduction to one of today's most terrible tragedies." Adam Hochschild, author of *To End All Wars* and *King Leopold's Ghost* "The most useful and up-to-date analysis of the complex internal dynamics of Syria today. . . . [It] destroys many of the simplistic stereotypes prevalent in the American conventional wisdom. . . . United States policy makers should view Erlich's masterful narrative as required reading. Had his book been available before the current violence in Syria erupted, the world might have been much wiser."

William O. Beeman, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota "Veteran journalist Reese Erlich, who knows Syria well, has written what may be the definitive account thus far of both foreign and domestic factors shaping its descent into fratricidal war. With the inclusion of important historical background, interviews from inside the country, and insights into the motivations of policy makers in Washington and elsewhere, the result is thorough and balanced reporting in which few come out looking good."

Stephen Zunes, professor of politics and coordinator of Middle Eastern studies, University of San Francisco "Erlich . . . has a rare gift for placing the human drama into its larger historical context, deftly introducing the reader to the many worlds that make up Syrian society. . . . Anyone who wants a quick but sophisticated primer on the Syrian Civil War should start here."

Joshua Landis, director, Center for Middle East Studies, University of Oklahoma "Read this book and you will receive an in-depth, objective, and truly fair understanding of what is taking place in the Middle East at this moment. We need Reese Erlich in the mass media."

Peter Coyote, actor, author of *Sleeping Where I Fall* "Reese Erlich is that increasingly rare specimen: a deeply informed foreign correspondent who immerses himself in the story he is covering. Inside Syria is fascinating and full of insights. That makes it a welcome antidote to the flood of ill-informed blather that has deformed our understanding of this alarming crisis."

Stephen Kinzer, author of *Overthrow* and *All the Shah's Men*

Reese Erlich is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books on foreign policy. A full-time freelance journalist and special correspondent, he recently reported for both CBS Radio and GlobalPost from the Kurdish Region of Iraq, interviewing Yazidis and Kurdish peshmerga and analyzing the US bombing campaign. Erlich also reports regularly for National Public Radio and Radio Deutsche Welle. His articles on the Middle East have appeared in the Christian Science Monitor, Atlantic Online, Foreign Policy, VICE News, and Vanity Fair Online. In 2012, the Society of Professional Journalists, Northern California, gave Erlich an Explanatory Journalism Award for his radio documentary titled "Inside the Syrian Uprising." In 2006 he shared a prestigious Peabody Award. For more information visit www.ReeseErlich.com.

This book is a fascinating inside view of one of the Syrian centered troubled areas....one of too many in this world. Well researched and written. Written before the the most recent current events in the middle east, the book come across as prophetic. The author has many contact within the various and confusing factions in the Syrian conflict and puts them to good use. The book appears to me to be very balanced, pulling no punches and taking no sides. His sympathies are with all the victims of this ongoing and horribly devastating civil war.

Reese Erlich's book *Inside Syria: The Backstory of Their Civil War and What the World Can Expect*, gives us an analysis of several critical factors necessary to understanding Syria's current day conflict to include: The history of Syria following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire to onset of their civil unrest in 2011, a thorough look at Syria's long history of political instability, an overview of the ideologies which makeup the factions of their internal conflict, and the foreign influences involved within the Syrian Civil War which further complicate the internal and geopolitical situation. Erlich combines both historical data and his own interviews, often with those of opposing ideologies, to illustrate the complexity of the current situation. While the strengths of his book lie in his ability connect Syria's past to its ongoing Civil War, there are instances where he veers away from conveying a non-biased point of view, and instead attempts to reinforce his own political ideology into the narrative. Nevertheless, we are presented with a well-organized chronology of the events leading up to the catalysts of the 2011 protests which sparked the complex conflict of opposing ideologies which we bear witness to today. Reese Erlich's thesis is not clearly defined in the opening of his book, as the foreword is provided by social justice advocate and anarcho-syndicalist Noam Chomsky. Instead of a preliminary thesis to examine throughout his book, we are given an outline of how the 2011 social

unrest led to the violent uprisings and Civil War which followed. However, we are provided with Erlich's thesis in the final pages of his book. Erlich attributes the brutality, unpredictability, and complexity of the Syrian Civil war to the foreign intervention which overshadows the fighting taking place between the many ideologies and religious sects inside of Syria. Erlich (2014) states: The longer fighting continued, the more foreign powers interfered. Russia sent massive amounts of arms and provided diplomatic cover for Assad's repression. Iran sent arms and military advisors, and it facilitated the entry into Syria of Hezbollah and Iraqi militias. The United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, and Israel all backed the rebels. The CIA trained selected rebels in Jordan. Foreigners bolstered the ranks of al-Qaeda-affiliated and other extremist rebels, further complicating matters. (p. 235) Erlich concludes that despite the complexity of the situation, the Syrian Civil War will eventually come to an end, and the Syrians will rebuild their country and government (Erlich, 2014). The thesis provided in the closing chapter, however factual, is rooted in the uncertainty of what Syria's political, economic, and religious makeup will look like, what the geopolitical consequences will ultimately be, and what internal struggles are likely to continue following the conclusion of its Civil War. His chronology of the Syria's history alludes to, that despite hoping for the best possible outcome, which is currently unknown, this will likely not be the last conflict within Syria's borders. Aside from just providing a chronology of the history, ideologies, and foreign influences within Syria, Erlich's reporting gives us insight into each of these factors through his interviews with many outside sources. From his interview with members of the United States State Department in Beirut, to former Palestinian refugees, to the members of the Muslim Brotherhood, we are given additional points of view which add further layers of complexity to the overall battlespace. These sources additionally provide us with insight into the ideologies, perceptions, and misconceptions of those effected by the current conflict. These interviews ultimately support Erlich's final thesis concept in the sense that the impact of the Syrian Civil War will have far and wide reaching consequences which are yet to be seen. However, Erlich's book will at times veer away from conveying a non-biased point of view on Syria's history and the topics covered, and instead leans toward a "leftist" ideology in an attempt to add depth to his chronology. Two notable instances of Erlich deviating from a neutral stance on the content he provides can be found in both his analysis of the United States' foreign policy, and of his apologetic attitude toward the Palestinian movement (including Hezbollah). In Chapter 11 he tries to explain the United States' foreign policy under the Obama administration, but instead

resorts to blaming the shortcomings of President Obama's inability to influence any outcome within Syria on the Republicans, Libertarians, and isolationists within our House and Senate leadership. Erlich (2014) then claims, "Right-wing isolationists, on the other hand, used anti-interventionist rhetoric to push a racist and xenophobic agenda" (p. 223). This is just one example of where we are presented with a very subjective opinion in a book that should otherwise contain only objective information. In Chapter 10, Erlich talks about his upbringing as a Zionist, and then later abandonment his faith following a debate with the outspoken Berkeley Rabbi Isaiah Zelden over the recognized rights of the Palestinians (Erlich, 2014). From this point forward we are subtly presented with Erlich's disdain for Israel's occupation of the Golan heights, Israel's attacks on Syrian soil (despite these attacks being against suspected Syrian arms support to Hezbollah), and Israel's internal policies towards Arabs within its borders. However, what connects these inferences to his sentiments of Palestinian apologetics comes in the closing lines of his book when he states, "Palestinian leader Hannan Ashrawi told me Palestinians stand in solidarity with the people of Syria. That makes sense to me. The people of Syria' with their tradition of tolerance' will ultimately prevail" (Erlich, 2014, p. 235). Well, of course the Palestinians stand in solidarity with Assad's Syria, as Syria has been a substantial supporter of Hezbollah in providing them political and military aid. In summary, Reese Erlich's book *Inside Syria* provides us with a substantial chronology of the history of Syria leading up to today's conflict. The complexity of the situation is well conveyed through his use of historical facts and first hand interviews. Erlich's elaboration upon the factions attempting to influence the current battlespace of Syria's Civil War, in addition to his conveyance of the geopolitical climate of foreign influences trying to steer this Civil War in their favor, are well articulated and support the fact that there are too many variables to predict the outcome of the current day Syrian Civil War. Aside from the sometimes heavily subjective and politically motivated opinions provided, we are presented with a great reference for gaining a better understanding the conditions and motivating factors of this conflict.

Inside Syria describes the current situation going on from a historical perspective. Gives the situation that is going on from different points of view. Good book to read and understand the beginning and the continued civil war that is going on. The interesting portion to me is the interview with the citizen from this country who want democracy. Very good book

The book does a good job on describing the recent history of Syria and the current conflict. It seems balanced and shows how the current position of the US is one of no hope for a better country.

Not bad.

It is really a series of essays and the information is repeated in each chapter. I was disappointed in this book and believe that for the price, better products are available.

Reese Erlich is a wonderful reporter/author. You will understand the intricate parts of our news stories, and also get a better or more honest slant, as he actually goes to these places that he is reporting on.

Relevant book for my paper.

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