



The Road to Fatima Gate: The Beirut Spring, the Rise of Hezbollah, and the Iranian War Against Israel

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The Road to Fatima Gate is a first-person narrative account of revolution, terrorism, and war during history's violent return to Lebanon after fifteen years of quiet. Michael J. Totten's version of events in one of the most volatile countries in the world's most volatile region is one part war correspondence, one part memoir, and one part road movie.

He sets up camp in a tent city built in downtown Beirut by anti-Syrian dissidents, is bullied and menaced by Hezbollah's supposedly friendly "media relations" department, crouches under fire on the Lebanese-Israeli border during the six-week war in 2006, witnesses an Israeli ground invasion from behind a line of Merkava tanks, sneaks into Hezbollah's post-war rubblescape without authorization, and is attacked in Beirut by militiamen who enforce obedience to the "resistance" at the point of a gun.

From the "Cedar Revolution" that ousted the occupying Syrian military regime in 2005, to the devastating war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, and to Hezbollah's slow-motion but violent assault on Lebanon's elected government and capital, Totten's account is both personal and comprehensive. He simplifies the bewildering complexity of the Middle East, has access to major regional players as well as to the man on the street, and personally witnesses most of the events he describes. *The Road to Fatima Gate* should be indispensable reading for anyone interested in the Middle East, Iran's expansionist foreign policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, asymmetric warfare, and terrorism in the aftermath of September 11.

The Road to Fatima Gate: The Beirut Spring, the Rise of Hezbollah, and the Iranian War Against Israel Details

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From Reader Review The Road to Fatima Gate: The Beirut Spring, the Rise of Hezbollah, and the Iranian War Against Israel for online ebook

Benjamin Ables says

Tendentious at best, Michael Totten's reportage of the Beirut Spring initially comes off as myopic, somewhat ignorant, and at times, even immature coverage of what can only be described as the denouement of more than two decades of instability in Lebanon. One is led to believe that Totten was initially completely unaware of the many intricacies at play within Lebanese politics both domestically, and vis-a-vis other regional actors. However, as the book progresses, Totten seems to mature as a reporter and present a more balanced piece.

Unfortunately, Totten relies heavily on the accounts of colleagues especially when reporting on Hezbollah as he was blacklisted by the organization. This was, admittedly, of Totten's own doing. The entire episode involving a post in poor humor on Totten's online blog, struck me as something that even a half-sensible individual would recognize as foolish.

All in all this is a decent supplemental read for anyone who already possesses an intermediate understanding of the Levant. For a more comprehensive read which provides a solid basis for subsequent texts, I would recommend both Robert Fisk and Tom Friedman.

Melissa McShane says

This book provides an excellent overview of the current situation in Lebanon and how that country's politics and culture are influenced by its neighbors, particularly Syria. Totten has a real love for Lebanon, and this makes him an ideal narrator and tour guide through the Middle East. Much of this material has appeared previously in his blog, but he's expanded on some events and tied others together to create a more unified story than the episodic nature of online updates allows. I came away from The Road to Fatima Gate with a less-shallow understanding of how the different Middle Eastern countries relate to one another, as well as a new picture of Beirut that is not the rubble-strewn devastation I remember from childhood.

Finrod says

Excellent book on the geopolitics of Lebanon and the Levant (Israel, Syria etc.) written by a real expert of the area, and imho the first hand account of the infamous attack of the Syrian Nazi party thugs to Christopher Hitchens by itself is worth buying and reading the whole book.

“The Road to Fatima Gate” was published only 4 years ago, in early 2011, but things have changed an awful lot in Lebanon (and obviously in the Arab world), making part of this book a bit outdated, but still it's an absolute must read if you want to understand the background of what's happening right now in that part of the world (i.e. the role of Hezbollah in the Syrian war).

I actually read this book while in Lebanon last September, a very interesting and important trip for me, and this book helped me understand what I saw.

Jack Whitsel says

Mike Totten's, *The Road to Fatima Gate*, is an in-depth account of the rise of Hezbollah and their influence within Lebanon. Following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Mike Totten serves as herald as Lebanon teeters upon the precipice; one hand reaching for a free-state, the other immersed in bloodshed.

Totten's approach to this subject is not only through diligent research, but also from his personal experience as a Foreign correspondent and analyst. Instead of approaching the subject at arm's-length, Totten has walked through the dahiyeh, the village of Ghajar, and other turbulent zones within the region.

Road to Fatima Gate also shines light on a region that by general perception is considered no different from any other state within the Middle East. Totten's account details otherwise as he guides the reader through Lebanon's struggle to be the modernized and cultural heart of the Arab world. Unfortunately, Hezbollah impedes that vision.

Mike Totten's book is a must read for those wishing to obtain insight about Beirut, Hezbollah, and Lebanon as a whole.

Kbullock says

This book is an essential source for anyone interested in the current state of Lebanon or the Arab-Israeli-Iranian conflict. The only weakness is the lack of photos or maps. Those who follow Totten's blogging know that his photography is every bit as compelling as his writing, so the lack of photos is frustrating. Even so, anyone interested in Middle Eastern affairs should read this book.

Jeremy Kroeker says

After reading this book by Michael J. Totten, I am way more confused about Lebanese politics than I was before... which means that he did a great job of explaining it. Really entertaining, and informative.

Ellis Amdur says

Jeffrey Goldberg, author of *Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror*, writes: ". . . an absolutely fearless reporter, both physically - he has explored the darkest corners of Middle East extremism - and morally. No one is as clear-eyed as Totten on the subject of Iran's repressive regime . . ." Unfortunately, too many people in the West, approaching the subject of Lebanon, simply gloss it over as a place of chaos. Totten delineates the dizzying array of factions, each at war with many of the others, now all of whom are dominated by Iran's proxy, Hezbollah. Lebanon, due to geography, has the role of an arc stone: chaos there reverberates throughout the Middle East, and Totten, through concise chapters, full of vivid characters and adventures, clearly explains the part of Syria, Iran, and Israel from the state level, and on a factional level, Hezbollah,

and Amal among the Shiites, the Sunni's, who are divided among both militants and nearly pacifists (Sinora and Hariri), the Druze and Allawites and the various Christian groups who range from Maronite groups focused on survival among a Muslim world to the murderous SSNP, a Nazi sympathizing group which finds common cause with Hezbollah. Read this book!

Razan says

Well written- easy reading but that's it when it comes to discussing it as a literary work. On the other hand, I consider Fatima's Gate as one of the worst books ever written about the Middle East. It is a biased monologue of the writer's experience of Lebanon, and it echoed more or less American news reports presenting more of a pro-Israeli/ Anti-Arab & Islamism rhetoric

Love says

I am a big fan of Totten's travel writing. This is his first book and it's not as good as his most recent writings. Still it deals with a very interesting topic so I would definitely recommend it to anyone interested in the Lebanese civil war or Hezbollah.

Caeruleum says

Ignorant and childish book. It's more like a published blog than a proper study. Read Robert Fisk or Thomas L. Friedman if you want to know what proper journalism on Lebanon is.

Pat says

Fascinating account of the muddled stew that is Lebanon. I liked the writer's style, and first-person accounts are always interesting to me. It was sometimes difficult to follow the thread of the narrative as it bounced back and forth among the many factions within this embattled country. I doubt many people are aware of the extent to which Iran is the puppet-master of this tragedy. The author makes a compelling point that no measure of peace in the Middle East can be possible unless and until the regime in Iran is ousted, either (hopefully) from within or from without. I would recommend this book as a good follow-up read to "From Beirut to Jerusalem" by Thomas L. Friedman.

Aaron Shields says

"There may be real peace at last in the Eastern Mediterranean when the citizens of Iran seize the levers of power, when al-Assad's family loses its control over Syria, and when Lebanon is the final home for all her children."

Wow- what an epic tragedy Lebanon is. Hopefully the above is realized. Soon.

Totten has major stones for reporting on the chaos of Lebanon and Hezbollah, etc. The story about Christopher Hitchens nearly getting killed perfectly summarized the fine line for a journalist in Beirut.

Great book, even when it gets confusing the more the recent history in Lebanon is explained.

Megan Prahl says

Stopped about halfway through . . . lost steam.

Dion Schuit says

It reads like you are watching a documentary. First time reader on this subject but I think it gives a great account on the situation with the different 'interests' at play making it a restless place to live to say the least.

Carl says

Sure, the book is one-sided. Obviously there is no discussion of Hezbollah's social welfare organization (the book just focuses on the militant side of Hezbollah). I would have liked to see Totten get not only into Southern Lebanon to see the disaster areas, but also the hospitals and schools.

However, going into the book knowing the author might not be the most objective man on the planet, the book is an excellent read. [And this doesn't disparage the author, he is quite open about his views].

The Lebanon-Israeli war took place during America's surge in Iraq, so it was lost in the news. The Hezbollah take-over of Beirut wasn't heavily reported. I will be honest, I missed these events in the shuffle of everyday life.

This book clarifies it all. The players, the religious sects, and the issues. Don't read this as a primary source before writing a paper on the issue, use it to flesh out your understanding of the area.

The book is remarkably engaging and well written, I would highly recommend.
