

Last Chance: The Middle East in the Balance

David Gardner



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In this magisterial work, one of the English language media's most respected authorities on the Arab world, David Gardner, addresses the urgent question: why does the Middle East keep missing its appointment with modernity? For too long the question has been the preserve of orientalists like Bernard Lewis. Clearsighted, never flinching from unpalatable truths, Gardner draws on his acute grasp of history and long experience covering the region as he examines key countries from Syria to Saudi Arabia to understand why conflict, sectarianism and despotism continue to flourish in the Arab world, even as they decline everywhere else. The 'Arab Exception', he argues, is largely a problem of the West's own-making. By supporting tyrants, fuelling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and demonising democratically-elected Islamist parties, the West in general but America in particular has incubated a region resistant to political and economic reform and suppurating with resentment.

With a new US administration planning its Middle East policy, Gardner argues for nothing less than a total reappraisal of what realpolitik means in the region. The traditional shibboleths: support Israel, build up a network of reliable strongmen, mollify the Saudis, suppress Islamism, simply will not do in the twenty-first century, he argues.

Both an introduction to the Modern Middle East and an impassioned polemic, Last Chance is essential reading for anyone concerned with the future of the region.

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