



Shut Up, I'm Talking: And Other Diplomacy Lessons I Learned in the Israeli Government--A Memoir

Gregory Levey

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Shut Up, I'm Talking is a smart, hilarious insider take on Israeli politics that reads like the bastard child of Thomas Friedman and David Sedaris. Now a political writer for Salon, Gregory Levey stumbled into a job as speechwriter for the Israeli delegation to the United Nations at age twenty-five and suddenly found himself, like a latter-day Zelig, in the company of foreign ministers, U.S. senators, and heads of state. Much to his surprise, he was soon attending U.N. sessions and drafting official government statements. The situation got stranger still when he was transferred to Jerusalem to write speeches for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Shut Up, I'm Talking is a startling account of Levey's journey into the nerve center of Middle Eastern politics at one of the most turbulent times in Israeli history. During his three years in the Israeli government, the Second Intifada continued on in fits and starts, Yasser Arafat died, Hamas came to power, and Ariel Sharon fell into a coma. Levey was repeatedly thrust into highly improbable situations -- from being the sole "Israeli" delegate (even though he's Canadian) at the U.N. General Assembly, with no idea how "his" country wanted to vote; to nearly inciting an international incident with his high school French translation of an Arab diplomat's anti-Israel remarks; to communicating with Israeli intelligence about the suspected perpetrators of suicide bombings; to being offered leftover salami from Ariel Sharon's lunch. As Levey got better acquainted with the personalities in the government's inner sanctum, he witnessed firsthand the improvisational and ridiculously casual nature of the country's behind-the-scenes leadership -- and realized that he wasn't the only one faking his way through politics.

With sharp insight and great appreciation for the absurd, Levey offers the first-ever look inside Israel's politics from the perspective of a complete outsider, ultimately concluding that the Israeli government is no place for a nice Jewish boy.

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