



Notes from a Sealed Room: An Israeli View of the Gulf War

Professor Robert Werman PhD

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In this compelling and often startling account, Robert Werman chronicles his experiences as an Israeli citizen living in Jerusalem during the Gulf War. On January 19, 1991, he began writing daily reports on his computer, sending them to friends and a few computer networks that dealt with Jewish culture and the politics of the Middle East. To Werman's surprise, he received numerous electronic responses to his entries, sometimes as many as one hundred a day. As a result, his "war diary" was born, a diary that he continued until February 22, 1991, when, near the end of the war, he was hospitalized for a heart condition.

In the early entries, Werman notes each Iraqi Scud attack, describing in detail the sealed room in which he and his family sought shelter during the expected chemical attacks. "Sitting in the antigas room, members of the family try to put on a brave face, make jokes. . . . Only the dog, a rather stately collie, sits quietly and does not appear at all excited. We pity the dog, for he is the only one without a mask. But then we remember that—without a mask—he is our canary in the coal mine." Futilely, Werman seeks patterns to the attacks, attempting to predict when they might occur. He writes of the nation's response to war: joggers running with their gas masks in hand, schools temporarily disbanded while children meet in small groups to continue their education, city streets emptied by six o'clock each evening as people wait in their homes for the sound of the sirens that herald an assault. He discusses the varying opinions concerning retaliation against Iraq, the fluctuating morale of the country, the damage produced by Iraqi missiles, and the widespread speculation of Israeli citizens concerning their country's survival. Yet Werman's daily reports, digressions, and explanations not only include his observations and impressions; they also poignantly reveal his own personal story and political, religious, and philosophical views.

Werman's journal gives a singular view of a country under siege, recounting in detail the pressures, conflicts, and dangers existing during a war. It is a distinctive book, a fascinating personal and political account of a man, his family, their nation, and a war.

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