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## “Golda” — An Incredible Story About an Indomitable Power

Monday, September 22, 2008

With Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni poised to become that nation’s next Prime Minister, historical parallels to the late Golda Meir are inevitable. “Golda,” as she was known, served as Israel’s Prime Minister from 1969 to 1974. She was expected to be a caretaker Prime Minister who would quickly be replaced with a more conventional leader. Nevertheless, her indomitable will and grandmotherly manner made her Israel’s indispensable leader during critical days in the nation’s history and in the context of the Cold War.

Born in the old Russian Empire in 1898, Golda Mabovich migrated to America as a little girl, settling with her family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. As a girl and young woman, Golda became urgently committed to the Zionist cause and moved to what was then known as Palestine in 1921 with her new husband, Morris Meyerson (she later Hebraicized her name to Meir).

When Israel emerged as a new nation in 1947, Golda was already recognized as a major figure in Zionist ranks. She later moved through a succession of offices and responsibilities in the Israeli government, serving as Foreign Minister before becoming the nation’s first woman Prime Minister in 1969.

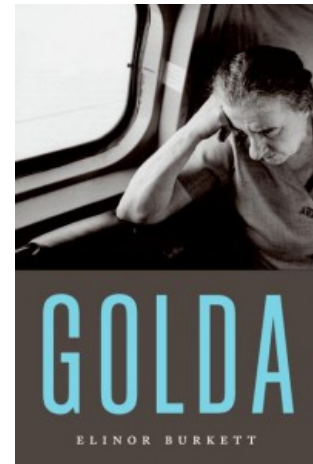
American readers of *Golda*, a new and fascinating biography of Golda Meir by Elinor Burkett (Harper), are likely to remember Golda’s starring role in history, especially on the international stage. In a sense, Golda Meir’s leadership role cemented Israel’s special place in the American consciousness. Even President Richard M. Nixon seemed to melt in her presence, and Israel got what the nation needed from America — vast financial support, overt and covert political support, and the sale of advanced American armaments and weaponry. This was a grandmother who did business.

Less known to most Americans, but essential to this story, is Golda Meir’s political liberalism, her early decision to abort a baby (“her Zionist obligations simply did not leave room for a child”) and divorce from her husband. Her story is instructive at many levels, telling the story of modern Israel through one woman’s role and legacy.

Her story is also a personal and national tragedy, as her legacy continues to divide the nation. I found Elinor Burkett’s [biography of Golda Meir](#) to be most helpful in understanding the cataclysmic and chaotic events of Israel’s history, the internal divisions that existed in Israel from the beginning, the nation’s quest for a unified identity, and the socialist experiment that many intended the new nation to become. On every page the backdrop is the young nation’s brave fight for survival. The story of Golda Meir is often not pretty, but it is never boring.

An excerpt:

*Her people adored her for all the wrong reasons — for how safe her towering strength made them feel and for the*



*aplomb her edgy wit lent them — rather than because they heard their own hopes and dreams reflected in her exhortations about socialism, equality, and self-sacrifice. While she was celebrated across the planet as the first personification of strong female political leadership, on the most pressing international issue — the alarming rise of terrorism — she was cast aside as a Cassandra despite what history has shown to be her prescience. In her every attempt to move Israel toward peace, she was hemmed in — by the great game between the United States and the Soviet Union and by Israel's political landscape as much as by her own obduracy.*

*And despite the reality that her nation's political paralysis constrained her from accomplishing much of what she longed to do, she was nonetheless forced to stay in office well beyond her time because there was no other way for her to protect a nation at risk, from its neighbors, its refugees, its economic precariousness, and its own contentious divisions.*

*A woman of greater wisdom might have resigned and let the younger generation battle it out, no matter the cost. A leader of foresight might have told her people everything they didn't want to hear; that the situation was not sustainable, that a dozen problems were woven into the national fabric, and that they were living on quicksand. A creative prime minister might have devised new approaches to everything from ethnic divisions to peacemaking. And an innovator might have burst the bubble of arrogant self-consciousness by explaining that the political system was ossified or acknowledging that Israelis were not, in fact, the new superheroes.*

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