

BOOK REVIEW

The Hundred Years' War on Palestine
Rashid Khalidi (Metropolitan Books, 2020), 336



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“The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine” by Rashid Khalidi, a renowned Palestinian historian, marks his eighth work on the Middle East and represents his most introspective endeavor. Individuals from various fields of study and the general public will find this information beneficial. Readers with a penchant for delving into historical narratives will find this book captivating, as it offers a unique perspective on the lived experiences of those involved in the resistance movement. This book holds great significance today as it draws striking comparisons to events that have unfolded since 7 October 2023.

Khalidi extensively employs 459 footnotes to document all the issues he references meticulously. His book strongly focuses on personal experiences, intertwining intimate family anecdotes, contemplating his diverse extended family, and encompassing various regions. The Khalidi family has been deeply involved in observing and analyzing Palestine’s complex history. The personal stories support the findings derived from his academic research and firsthand experience of historical events.

He opens the book by recounting the exchange between his ancestor Yusuf Diya al-Din Pasha al-Khalidi and Theodore Herzl in 1899. In this correspondence, Yusuf Diya al-Din cautions against the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, highlighting the potential for conflict among the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities already residing there. The Palestinians were often overlooked and seldom included in

discussions regarding their future. The deconstruction and deinstitutionalization of Palestinian society would be concealed by condescension and bromides, eventually compelling the native population “to relinquish their homeland to another people against their will.” The book argues that the Palestinians have consistently maintained their resistance to this idea and show no signs of relenting.

The author divides his book into six chapters, called “declarations.” The first chapter covers the period from 1917 to 1939 and provides a comprehensive analysis of the British order before the Second World War. He explores various facets of the Balfour Declaration, and British support for Zionists, highlighting this as an act of belligerence against Palestinians. The author discusses how the colonial master, Britain, took measures to dismiss the very existence of the Palestinian populace, as well as their national dreams and desires. He calls attention to the fact that while settler colonialism was elapsing globally, the situation in Palestine was taking a different shape altogether.

In the second chapter, the author writes about the period of the “Nakbah” and focuses on how not only the West but also some Arab regimes – specifically King Abdullah I of Jordan – supported the Zionists. Khalidi also disputes the idea that, during the events leading up to the 1967 war, Israel was facing impending annihilation, as portrayed by the David versus Goliath narrative. As reality stands, it had already been agreed by three US intelligence services that if Egypt were to attack first, Israel would be the eventual victor. It must be noted that Israel started the first attack on 5 June 1967.

The third chapter is particularly noteworthy because of its level of detail. It centers on the then Prime Minister of Israel Ariel Sharon’s invasion of Lebanon and the departure of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to Tunisia. It addresses the inability of the US to protect Palestinian civilians, which culminated in the catastrophic massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in 1982.

The fourth chapter highlights the aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, including the emergence of Hezbollah as a prominent actor in Lebanon. The fifth chapter explores the first "Intifada" in 1987, the Oslo Accords in 1993, and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. The sixth chapter covers events in the twenty-first century until 2014, detailing the unsuccessful attempts and efforts to agree on a "two-state solution." It also examines the events surrounding the second Intifada in 2000 and the destructive confrontations in the Gaza Strip in 2008, 2012, and 2014.

The book discusses the impact of colonial settlers and how strong Western partiality favoring Zionists has shaped Israel into what it is today. The author criticizes the Arab leaders for their lack of authentic backing for the Palestinian cause. Through comprehensive analysis, he highlights the involvement of specific Arab countries in undermining attempts at Palestinian nationalism. This support extends to several targeted killings of prominent PLO leaders.

Despite the most challenging situations, Khalidi manages to find a positive aspect. In 1967, the defeat of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria by Israel played a significant role in empowering the Palestinians and allowing them to assert themselves in their cause. The author was in Beirut during the ensuing Palestinian political and cultural renaissance, and witnessed it firsthand. He showcases how, in this space, writers, poets, academics, artists, and intellectuals had the opportunity to address Arab public opinion regarding the injustice faced by Palestine, bypassing their authoritarian leaders.

Khalidi concludes his book with insightful guidance, likely aimed at the upcoming generation of Palestinians. He underscores the importance of recognizing the colonial nature of the Palestine-Israel conflict. However, he also emphasizes the crucial acknowledgment of the presence of two distinct groups in Palestine. The key to a lasting resolution lies in their reciprocal recognition and the assurance of equal rights in all life aspects – human, personal, civil, political, or national.

Khalidi recognizes that this situation will require a demonstration of political creativity from everyone involved. He anticipates that the most significant obstacle for Palestinians will be establishing a fresh national consensus. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine shows no signs of resolution, and a thorough examination of the situation suggests that it will take a considerable amount of time before Israel, with its substantial settler colonial roots and Western support, is willing to acknowledge and engage with the Palestinian population.

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