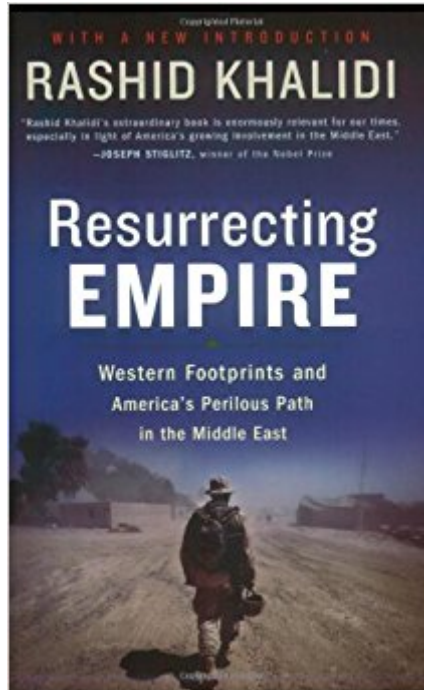


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Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints And America's Perilous Path In The Middle East



Synopsis

Begun as the United States moved its armed forces into Iraq, Rashid Khalidi's powerful and thoughtful new book examines the record of Western involvement in the region and analyzes the likely outcome of our most recent Middle East incursions. Drawing on his encyclopedic knowledge of the political and cultural history of the entire region as well as interviews and documents, Khalidi paints a chilling scenario of our present situation and yet offers a tangible alternative that can help us find the path to peace rather than Empire. We all know that those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Sadly, as Khalidi reveals with clarity and surety, America's leaders seem blindly committed to an ahistorical path of conflict, occupation, and colonial rule. Our current policies ignore rather than incorporate the lessons of experience. American troops in Iraq have seen first hand the consequences of U.S. led "democratization" in the region. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict seems intractable, and U.S. efforts in recent years have only inflamed the situation. The footprints America follows have led us into the same quagmire that swallowed our European forerunners. Peace and prosperity for the region are nowhere in sight. This cogent and highly accessible book provides the historical and cultural perspective so vital to understanding our present situation and to finding and pursuing a more effective and just foreign policy. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Although I disagree with Professor Khalidi on a number of points, I want to make it clear at the outset that this is an excellent book, very well-written and edited, and driven with the sort of

restrained passion that makes for a most interesting read. His command of the modern history of the Middle East is admirable and obvious. But Khalidi is not a disinterested observer by any stretch of the imagination. He has an agenda, that of laying the blame for the backwardness of the Middle East at the doorstep of the West while championing the cause of the Islamic people of the region. He is especially passionate when presenting the case for the Palestinians. His outrage at the historical record of a brutal, exploitive, and hypocritical colonialism (was there any other kind?) by the West, especially Great Britain and France, fairly sings the pages. His disgust at the stupidity, mendacity, and narrow-mindedness of the current Bush administration is palpable. What Khalidi does not do very well is offer the sort of forward-looking, balanced, and dispassionate critique that would lead to a solution to the trouble in the Middle East. He offers a first step toward a solution to the problem in Iraq, namely that of a multilaterally-guided transition to a sovereign Iraq as opposed to the current bilateralism of the United States and Great Britain. Along the way he points out that it was the Western powers who concocted the artificial Iraqi state in the first place, and it was the Cold War US government that supported Saddam Hussein and helped him to brutalize the Iraqi people. However he does not offer specifics on how a recurrence of a Baathist-like dictatorship, or a civil war, or a Shiite theocracy (or all three in succession) can be avoided after the Western powers leave. Furthermore in the seething chapter on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict he offers no solution at all, merely a call for "real" negotiations toward a solution, with the implication that the solution he has in mind is not for public consumption. The very title of his chapter, "The United States and Palestine" hints at his attitude toward Israel and what his solution might be. What Khalidi does not see (and in his way is as blind as the neocons in the White House) is that the United States and Israel and others have their interests as well. It is one thing to cite history and its inequities; it is another thing to realize that regardless of the mistakes made in the past, we have the present to deal with, and that any solution in the Middle East will require that the interests of people alive today be acknowledged and taken into consideration. Just as a military "victory" over Saddam Hussein is no solution to the problems the Iraqi people and the region face, neither is any "shut up and go home" solution going to work for the rest of the world. Certainly the US is not going to allow Israel to be overrun, nor are we, rightly or wrongly, going to sit by quietly while an Iran-like theocracy bent on acquiring nuclear weapons and exporting its Islamic rule, mushrooms out of the debris in Iraq. It is not just realpolitik but realism itself that dictates that the world cannot allow an unbridled Islamic radicalism of the sort that exists in Iran, or even worse, of the sort that had taken over Afghanistan, to expand. Khalidi argues strongly that the US hasn't paid sufficient attention to "the region's political dynamics" or given the "Middle Eastern realities" the seriousness they deserve (p. 165). I think he's

right; however the same could be said about his non-awareness of the global realities. For all his learnedness and his sharply candid expression, unfortunately I see in Khalidi's overall tone and approach the partisan politician more than I see the historian or the political scientist. Typical is this from page 172 (and elsewhere): "Iraqis and others in the Middle East have a strong sense of history." (And other people don't?) This vague and superior sound-byte pronouncement from on high reminds me unhappily of what politicians in the US are fond of doing, that is, telling us what "the American people" think. Carrying this historical burden (that Khalidi seems to think the Iraqi people are especially saddled with) to an absurdity (still on page 172), he objects to what he sees as "a symbolic contingent of Mongolian soldiers" as part of the US-led coalition in Iraq. He believes their presence may provoke "vividly the history of earlier occupations of Baghdad, such as that in 1258 when it was sacked by the Mongols"! Yes, that's 1258. Bottom line: partisan, passionate, even prejudicial, but very much worth reading.

When an administration clothes itself in secrecy, oblivious to the history of a region before charging into war, it runs the risk of failure. As Rashid Khalidi carefully explains, this is exactly what is happening in Iraq and the consequences will long be felt. "Resurrecting Empire" is a hard-hitting critique of a White House that has gotten us into a mess with no end in sight. It is a timely book exposing the naivete of leaders with tunnel vision. The author writes with a serious and often weighty pen; this is not a book to be read in one sitting. Khalidi effectively lays out the history of the region, the strategic importance of oil, the Palestinian/Israeli situation and America's reactions and responses to what has happened in the Middle East prior to the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and what the ramifications may be. I found those chapters about oil and Palestine to be the most fascinating sections of the book. Oil is an issue that the Bush White House doesn't like to talk about too much and the Palestinian question, as the author points out, has become even more of a problem with the administration's tilt toward Israel. "Resurrecting Empire" is a highly laudable work and is for the serious reader who wants to get to know more about the heart and the history of this volatile region of the world. Had Bush and his cronies made any attempt to learn more of what the Middle East is like, the United States might not be in the rough situation we face in Iraq today.

Rashid Khalidi warned in his latest book of the transformation of the United States into an empire, following in the footsteps of former Western empires whose fate was colonial failure after a bitter and failing confrontation with the colonies' natives. Published in 2004 slightly after the American liberation of Baghdad, Khalidi's book, *Empire*, can be divided into five main parts. The first part

criticizes the American war on Iraq saying that it was uncalled for and waged by people driven by their personal interests more than their claims of defending America against the danger of terrorism. In the second part, Khalidi highlighted the failure of British and France to colonize most of the Arab world saying that behind this failure, there was popular determination to win independence. In this part, historian Khalidi committed a lot of anachronisms. He failed to put what he termed the national struggle in its greater regional and international context. Was the Palestinian revolution against the British out of national motives or was it instigated by the growing power of the axis countries that were trying to win back colonies they had lost to Britain and France in WWI? Khalidi's emotional description of what he sees as struggle for national sovereignty is perhaps the only drawback in his book. Khalidi then moves to describe the growth of relations between the United States and the Arab world ever since the 1919 post WWI Versailles Conference delegated what came to be known as the King-Crane Commission to learn about the Arab peoples' wishes. The committee astoundingly found that Arabs thought, if mandate was their only option, they would go for American mandate. The Arab perspective of America changed drastically, however, especially with the growing interest of American oil firms in the region. The anti-American Arab sentiment grew even further with America heavily interfering in favor of the Israelis in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. According to Khalidi, the United States failed to deliver all the promises that it would pressure Israel to stop its aggressive policy of settlement of Palestinian land during Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations. Khalidi also fell heavily on late Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat accusing him of sabotaging the peace process in favor of his personal interests and the interests of his corrupt entourage.

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