

**Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and
America's Perilous Path in the Middle East**

Rashid Khalidi

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Written at a critical historical juncture of Arab-western relations, Khalidi's text provides a refreshing and informed account of western intervention in the Middle East. It stresses the catastrophic human and political consequences of western colonial adventures in the region and the neglect of this historical experience by current American foreign policy decision makers. Although written primarily for a non-academic, American audience, it is a useful and important text on contemporary Middle East history.

Accessible and highly readable, it provides insights into a series of major issues currently relevant to the study of the Middle East: democracy,

oil, Palestine, and Iraq. The first chapter provides an account of western colonialism's social, political, economic, and cultural legacy wrought on the Middle East. Beginning with a brief introduction to the American march to war with Iraq, the author establishes an approach employed throughout the text: juxtaposing the historical western colonial experience with the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. Locating western involvement in the Middle East within the context of the Ottoman Empire's decline, Khalidi highlights the differential systems of colonial rule imposed on the region. Throughout, he emphasizes the indigenous resistance to colonialism, thus arguing against Orientalist discourses of indigenous acquiescence and subservience to the supposed benevolence of colonialist rule. Two important points emerge: first, that the political structures imposed by the colonial regimes have persisted, and second, that the region's political culture remains deeply rooted in the anti-colonial experience. This experience – entirely conditioned through European involvement in the region – meant that for many, the United States never experienced the same political and cultural hostility as Europe. Throughout the cold war, however, the United States' image as a disinterested outside power began to give way to an image of the United States as a significant power broker in the region with many interests, and, most importantly, few objectives compatible with the political desires of the region's peoples.

The second chapter powerfully argues against the attempts of western powers to “democratize” the Middle East. Khalidi details the “good/bad” Middle Easterner dichotomy by highlighting the contradictions of American rhetoric toward such “disobedient” countries as Syria and such “friendly” (but no less repressive) countries as Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. In discrediting the Bush administration's grandiose plans to democratize the Middle East, Khalidi avoids the reductionism characteristic of so many critics and provides a nuanced and complex discussion of the convergence of Israeli and American interests in the region. Stressing the disconnect between rhetoric and reality, he argues convincingly against the West's imposition of democracy by citing numerous historical examples of where indigenous democracy was stifled to serve the West's interests.

The geostrategic importance of oil has mediated the post-colonial political and economic relationships between the West and the Middle East. Khalidi demonstrates, by providing a historical account of the Iranian, Iraqi, and Saudi oil industries in the third chapter, the extent to which the West extended its power so that western oil companies could maintain their control over oil production. Securing their control over oil production and rev-

enues meant controlling these countries' domestic and regional politics, typically at the expense of the people's political and economic aspirations. In one way or another, these countries were almost entirely shaped by oil.

In the fourth chapter, where he tackles the question of the United States and Palestine, Khalidi challenges the teleology of the American-Israeli relationship by focusing partly on the initial positive and friendly relations between the United States and several Arab states. This discussion serves to emphasize that the United States was not entirely and always opposed to Palestinian aspirations, but that certain geo-strategic issues (e.g., oil and the cold war), domestic issues (e.g., the influence of the Christian Right), and regional interests (e.g., the rise of anti-western regimes) gradually moved its political and cultural position closer to that of Israel. Through selections from the language and terminology of leaders to media representations, Khalidi succinctly highlights the union of American and Israeli interests vis-à-vis Palestine and the Palestinians.

The final chapter is a passionate plea against imperial hubris and the hegemonic politics of an ideological administration. Reiterating that the Bush administration has failed to heed the lessons of Europe's colonial experience in the region, Khalidi emphasizes the lack of expertise available to (or solicited by) this administration. The implications of such a situation are profound, most notably in resolving the current quandary in Iraq. The author concludes the discussion by arguing that a solution must be found at the international level in order to ease the burden of transition on the Iraqi people, who suffered terribly under Saddam's regime, the sanctions, and now the occupation of their country.

Although the text is intended for a broad audience and is suitable only for lower-level undergraduate teaching, it is still a worthy addition to any collection. For what it seeks to achieve – providing a sound account of western intervention in the Middle East to a broad audience – it serves its purpose well. It is thus an important text for average readers or anyone interested in contextualizing the current regional situation. A clear departure from his earlier works, Khalidi's text is a powerful challenge to the plethora of popular books written by "experts" seeking to "explain" the Middle East. While not directly engaging Islamic thought or practice throughout, Khalidi's text serves two very important purposes. First, in challenging the culturalist arguments that posit Islam's supposed aversion to democracy, Khalidi highlights a very deep and rich history of Islamic experimentation with democratic politics that were ultimately undermined by western powers. Second, in selectively de-centering the influence of religion in mediat-

ing the West-Middle East relationship, Khalidi challenges mainstream discourses claiming civilizational irreconcilability.

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