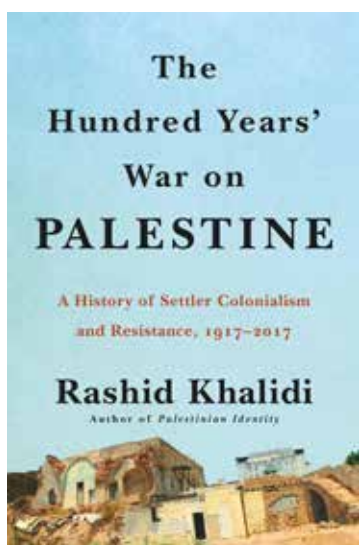


THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

By Daoud Kuttab

Rashid Khalidi's First-Row Seat at the Decades-Old War on Palestine

The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance 1917-2017. By Rashid Khalidi. (Macmillan) New York, 2020. 336 pp.



Most books on the Middle East and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict fall into one of two categories. One category is marked by a brand of writing executed by academics, historians, journalists, and other observers in one capacity or another. Those are highly academic and full of footnotes with a thesis backed by documents and interviews. The other kind are personal books that make use of diaries and observations, mostly by journalists, diplomats, and cosmopolitans.

Rashid Khalidi, a well-known Palestinian historian and the Edward Said Professor of Modern History at Columbia University, has written something unique. His latest book *The One Hundred Years' War on Palestine* is a high-quality academic effort ripe with vital facts and figures. Khalidi uses 459 footnotes to document all the issues he refers to. Yet at the same time, his book is highly personal, weaving personal family stories, reflecting on his own wide-ranging extended family, and spanning continents. One of those stories is that of his uncle Husayn Fakhri Al-Khalidi, who was imprisoned by the British in the Seychelles islands, and spent decades in exile in the first half of the 20th century. Readers take an imaginary walk with Rashid as he drops in on his father, Ismael Raghīb Al-Khalidi, an Arab diplomat working in New York's UN headquarters, and witness his shock as American Jews march and fundraise to support the Israeli occupation in 1967.

During the 1970s, readers get a front-row seat in Beirut before and during the Israeli invasion, while Mona, Rashid's wife (who is pregnant at the time with their son Ismael) works as an editor

for the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. Ismael would at an older age help his dad review this book, as Khalidi notes in his acknowledgment. Readers also follow Khalidi during the First Intifada and on the eve of the Madrid Peace Conference. Khalidi's visit to east Jerusalem would result in his being seconded to help the Palestinian delegation to Madrid and Washington. He would soon become privy to the disastrous results that the alternative talks in Oslo have come to represent in the terrible years since the intifada. Khalidi also shares his own thoughts on his Chicago university colleague, and later president, Barack Obama.

The personal stories give important credence to the conclusions that Khalidi draws from both his academic research and his front-row seat to history. Khalidi heaps huge responsibility regarding all that has happened to Palestine on the British and the Americans, as well as other Western countries.

In his book, Khalidi breaks the hundred years of war on Palestine into six periods. He describes the Balfour declaration and all the British bias in favor of Jewish Zionists that followed, especially between 1917 and 1939, as the first declaration of war on Palestine. He shows with skill and documentation the simple fact that the great colonial power at the time, Great Britain, not only acquiesced with Jewish Zionists but also went overboard in denying the existence of the Palestinian people and Palestinian nationalism. Khalidi argues that while settler colonialism was ending in the

middle of the 20th century, in Palestine it was just beginning.

In the second declaration of war, Khalidi deals with the 1947-8 Nakbeh with similar precision in identifying the Western world's complicity with Zionists and with some Arab regimes (notably King Abdullah I of Jordan) to continue denying Palestinian nationalism. In the run-up to the 1967 war, Khalidi exposes the myth that Israel was in danger of extinction (personified in David fighting the Arab Goliath) when in fact the consensus of three U.S. intelligence services had been that if Egypt were to attack, Israel would "whip the hell out of them". Of course, it would be Israel that made the first attack on June 5, 1967.

Perhaps the most detailed chapter in the book is what Khalidi calls the third declaration of war on Palestine, namely Ariel Sharon's invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut, followed by the departure of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) fighters to Tunisia and the ensuing massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in 1982 (for which U.S. guarantees to protect the safety of Palestinian civilians proved worthless).

Khalidi concludes his book with the first and second intifadas, praising the relatively unarmed 1987 uprising and criticizing the Second Intifada of 2000 as having literally wasted all the public relations gains that Palestinians made during the First Intifada. He references here their heroic early resistance to Sharon's brutal Israeli war machine and Israeli defense minister's Yitzhak Rabin's alleged orders to "break the bones" of

Palestinian youth in an effort to stop the first uprising.

In addition to the colonial settler theme and total western bias favoring Zionists and Israel throughout his book, Khalidi also deals in a harsh way with Arab leaders' failure to genuinely support the Palestinian cause. He details how certain Arab countries were active in weakening the Palestinian national movement in various ways, including supporting a number of assassinations of top PLO leaders by means of Palestinian groups aligned to them.

On the Palestinian leadership side, Khalidi is also brutally honest in his criticism. He gives general support to the historic PLO (especially Fatah) leaders but is not gentle in his criticism of the way they handled the back channel of the talks in Norway which led to the Oslo Accords. He argues that through lack of insight and skill, they agreed to many of the demands that simultaneous negotiations in Washington (in which he was involved) were refusing from their Israeli counterparts. Ironically, Khalidi reveals, Israeli negotiators in Washington had dropped the demand (made by former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir) for a Jordanian-Palestinian negotiating team and a refusal to allow Palestinian leaders from Jerusalem like Faisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi from participating. He said the Israeli decision was taken to help strengthen Palestinian negotiators from inside Palestine as a counter to those from the PLO on the outside.

Perhaps the harshest criticism is made

of the current Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, who Khalidi writes has "presided ineffectually over the grave deterioration in the already weakened state of the Palestinian national movement". He blames Abbas for his inability to stop the intensification of inter-Palestinian conflict and the "substantial expansion of Zionist colonies in what remained of Palestine". While not mentioning Yasser Arafat's name, Khalidi compares Abbas to the historic Palestinian leader by saying that Abbas "was neither charismatic nor eloquent; he was not known for personal bravery or considered a man of the people". He concludes the section on Abbas by calling him the "least impressive of the early generation of Palestinian leaders".

In his concluding chapter, Khalidi reviews the possible scenarios for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and concludes that despite some fears, Israel will not be able to expel or obliterate the Palestinian people and that it will eventually need to deal directly with Palestinian nationalism. He believes that Zionism has flourished by and large because of the support of Britain and the United States and that once the American people truly understand what is happening in Palestine and the true nature of Zionist colonial settlement, the myth that has kept Israel thriving for so long will begin to be exposed. He calls on Palestinians to do more work in the United States to help hasten this transition, which he says is underway.

Khalidi also argues that Palestinians must amend their own thinking about the

Israelis. He gives plenty of reasons why Palestinians have refused to entertain the existence of any other people in Palestine but concludes that “while the fundamentally colonial nature of the Palestinian–Israeli encounter must be acknowledged, there are now two peoples in Palestine irrespective of how they came into being.” He adds that the conflict cannot be resolved between them “until the national existence of each is not denied by the other”.

Rashid Khalidi has succeeded in bridging the heart and the head in tackling the wars

that have been declared on Palestine and the Palestinian people. He has combined the highest academic standards and brought in the human and personal aspects often ignored in the worldwide narratives that deal with this conflict.

The hundred years' war unfortunately has not ended and an honest appraisal of the situation brings about the conclusion that it will be a long time before Israel, a powerful settler colonial country supported by the West, would be willing to recognize and deal with a proud Palestinian people. (R)