

The Hundred Years' War on Palestine

Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' of War on Palestine*, Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2020, Pages 319

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State of Palestine is marked by different social and political conflicts throughout the history. Lack of political and cultural coherence between the Palestinians made it easy for the outsiders to colonize and control the land of Palestine. Palestine had to go through a series of war after the international intervention in the Middle Eastern region in the scenario of World Wars. The government of Great Britain never considered the people of Palestine in deciding the fate of Palestine, whether through the Balfour Declaration, White Policy Paper, or Partition Plan of Palestine that laid the basis of Arab-Israel wars later on. Plenty of literature has been written on wars in Palestine and its causes but this book of "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine" proposes complete insight of events that gradually and slowly led the people of Palestine, to lose their land in the hands of the European Jews. The pattern of a story adopted by the author, makes the history of Palestine and its wars, more comprehensible. Furthermore, the struggle of author's ancestors for the independence of Palestine brought a unique kind of originality to the text of the writer that seems to be invisible in most of the contemporary literature. Through his book the author critically analyzed the biased British Policies that ultimately created never ending conflicts in the region. In addition to that, the author highlighted the incapable and British-influenced leadership of Palestine that could not do any better for the people of Palestine.

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“The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine” was published on January 28, 2020, and consists of six chapters that provide a detailed account of the declaration of wars in Palestine. The author made an attempt to convince the Israeli government to adopt alternative ways instead of oppressive governmental frameworks and policies. He began with the family connections to the land of Palestine and his own relevance to this issue and then the role of “absentee landlords” in providing assistance to Zionists later on. The author made a well-thought argument about the “colonial conquest” in Palestine that was less dependent on the concept of the nationalistic claim of Zionists and more on British control of the land. The author examined the shift in the sense of identity and culture, that transformed the idea of nationalism in the Middle East after the “religious foundation of the state was diminished” as a result of Ottoman military defeats. He made a comprehensive comparison between native Jews and Zionist, as those natives who were a total “6 per cent of total population” and unlike Zionists settlers “they saw themselves, and were seen as Jews who were part of the indigenous Muslim-majority society.” Impact of the wrenching post-war political changes including Balfour Declaration, which obliged people to rethink long- standing senses of identity”. The author criticizes the Palestinian reaction to Balfour Declaration as it was “late in coming” but it somehow created the idea of “modern nationalism” in Palestine “with the increasing use of the terms “Palestine” and “Palestinians” that led them to organize politically, as seven Palestine Arab congresses were planned from 1919 to 1928. The author made a criticism on the mandate of the League of Nations for Palestine, which left no stone unturned to suppress Palestinian identity through ‘Mandate for Palestine’ that resulted in a huge influx of the European Jews in Palestine and later on Nazis government in 1933 changed the whole population structure of Palestine. The author blamed the Palestinian leadership for their “timid diplomatic approach” and “lack of a collective consciousness” that could not convince the British government in their favour. The author named early settlers, Ben-Gurion and Ben- Zvi, who made

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intentional efforts to seek integration into local society by “taking Ottoman nationality, studying in Istanbul, and learning Arabic and Turkish.” After a series of wars in early nineteenth century including Libyan war in 1911–12, Balkan Wars of 1912–13 and finally World War-I led the Ottoman Empire to diminish completely.” He differentiated Palestinian identity movements from others as they could not build “overarching framework” of the national movement in two decades. Further the partition plan of the Royal Commission under Lord Peel 1937, led to Arab revolts. Deep internal differences between Palestinians went in the favour of the Zionist settlers as some of them welcomed the partition plan and some opposed all recommendations. The revolt reached its height in late 1938, and at the same time World War-II started in Europe which created a shift in Britain’s policy towards Palestine. For the purpose of responding the British issued a “White paper policy” which restricted buying of Arab lands by Arab Jews and rejected Lord Peel’s partition plan. This paper intensified the situation in Palestine as Zionists completely rejected this policy.

In the second chapter of the book named The Second Declaration of War, 1947–1948, the author provides an overview of the UN partition plan for Palestine by dividing it into independent Jewish state which turned into violent demonstrations all over Palestine. Later on, the British withdrawal from the region made the situation even worse. He analysed the short sidedness of the British policy that resulted in a war of 1947, after which Israel declared independence. The author showed his disappointment in the Palestinian political society and the British hypocrisy after World War-II as “many of leaders were in exile or British detention.” He criticized the Palestinian leadership for not creating a single military unit, instead of their huge participation in World War-II. Another crucial event that is worth noting from the book is the alignment of the Arab rulers with Britain. Formation of Arab League in 1945, was the evidence of this alignment that made a decision to remove references to Palestine from the inaugural

communique of the League and further decided to restrict the choice of the Palestinian representation.

Another event of war described by the author is the six-day war between the Arabs and the Israeli forces. This war is of critical importance as it deprived the Arabs of much of their land including Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and Israelis were successful in pushing the forces of Jordan from the West Bank, and most critically Israelis took complete control of Jerusalem.

The author discussed the fourth war that took place in Palestine in 1982, and is known as the Lebanon war in which Israeli bombing in Beirut and Lebanon resulted in a war between the Israeli forces and Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The author has portrayed this war event as the Israeli forces invaded Lebanon with the help of the US troops and they made PLO to leave Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. In the absence of the US and even the Arab support and immense pressure from America and Israel, PLO had to leave Lebanon that resulted in the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon that in turn caused a civil war. Additionally, by the end of this war, more than 19000 inhabitants of Lebanon were killed and almost 30000 got injuries. Many were forced to leave their homes. It was the first event in the history when Israel forced a regime change in any country of the Middle East. Both the financial and the military support of the US throughout this war made Israel to occupy more Palestinian lands by force.

Being an eye witness of the first Intifada, the writer discussed a Palestinian uprising that happened in 1967, and shook the whole of Palestine including the state of Israel. It started with the death of four Palestinians by an Israeli army vehicle in Jabalya refugee camp. The author has analyzed the tactics adopted by Israel in order to colonize the West Bank and Gaza strip, by making two hundred settlements. Till 1976, no national element representing Palestinian identity was allowed in these areas. Violent riots and demonstrations in the Gaza

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strip and the West bank, resulted in several Palestinian deaths. Another incident that took place on the land of Palestine, was in March 2002, when the leader of Israeli opposition, Ariel Sharon attacked Al Aqsa mosque with the armed forces that created an outrage between the Palestinians, and resulted in an immense bloodshed of Israelis and Palestinians.

Though the author's vision could be called biased due to his personal affiliation with the land of Palestine but he made some valid arguments throughout this book and made the reader of the book realize about the atrocities by the British government, European Zionists and later on, by the US government. Being an eyewitness of the most of the events, he has shown everything in a clear perspective. This book is one of the complete conflict story of Palestine's occupation and thus rightly named as "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine."