



PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH



Rashid Ismail Khalidi

Born in New York City to a father of Palestinian origin and a Lebanese-American mother, Rashid Khalidi grew up in New York where he attended the United Nations International School. In 1970, he received a BA from Yale University and in 1974 a D. Phil. from Oxford University. His teaching career began at the Lebanese University and the American University of Beirut; returning to America, he has held positions at the University of Chicago, Georgetown University, and at Columbia University, where he currently serves as Edward Said Professor of Modern Arabic Studies and Chair of the History Department. He served as an informed and expert Palestinian resource for foreign journalists in Beirut during the Lebanese War, and was an important commentator in the US during the 1990-91 Gulf War and before and after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

Khalidi has been a research fellow at the independent Institute for Palestine Studies and is editor of its *Journal of Palestine Studies*, and was director both of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and of the Center for International Studies at the University of Chicago; he is a member of the National Advisory Committee of the US Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East which describes itself as a national organization of Jews, Christians, and Muslims dedicated to dialogue, education, and advocacy for peace based on the deepest teachings of the three religious traditions. Khalidi is member of the Board of Sponsors of *The Palestine-Israel Journal*, a founding trustee of The Center for Palestine Research and Studies, and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Khalidi's research covers primarily the history of the modern Middle East, focusing on the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean with an eye to the emergence of various national identities, and exploring the role that external powers played in their development. He has researched the impact of the press on forming new senses of community and explored the role education plays both in the construction of political identity and in the way in which narratives have developed over the past centuries in the region.

Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness (1997) is Khalidi's most influential and most widely cited book. It was the first book to demonstrate substantive Palestinian nationalism in the early Mandatory period, placing the emergence of Palestinian national identity in the context of Ottoman politics and British colonialism and of the early Zionist efforts in the Levant. Khalidi describes the Arab population of British Mandatory Palestine as having "overlapping identities", with some or many expressing loyalties to villages, regions, a projected nation of Palestine, an Arab national project, as well as to Islam and Christianity. Khalidi also documents active opposition by the Arab press to Zionism in the 1880s. His dating of the emergence of Palestinian nationalism to the early 20th century and his tracing of its contours provide a reply to Israeli nationalist claims that

Palestinians had no collective claims prior to the 1948 creation of Israel, arguing that Arabs living in Palestine began to regard themselves as a distinct people decades before 1948 and that the struggle against Zionism does not by itself sufficiently explain Palestinian nationalism. *Palestinian Identity* won the Middle East Studies Association's top honor, the Albert Hourani Prize, as best book of 1997.

In *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (2004), Khalidi takes readers on a historical tour of Western involvement in the Middle East and argues that such interactions continue to have a colonialist nature that is both morally unacceptable and likely to backfire.

Khalidi's *Sowing Crisis* (2009) places the US approach to the Middle East in a historical context. He is sharply critical of US policies during the Cold War, asserting that policies directed against the Soviet Union undermined democracy and increased tensions in the Middle East. He writes, "It may seem hard to believe today, but for decades the United States was in fact a major patron, indeed in some respects the major patron, of earlier incarnations" of radical, militant Islam, in order to use all possible resources in waging the Cold War. He adds, "The Cold War was over, but its tragic sequels, its toxic debris, and its unexploded mines continued to cause great harm, in ways largely unrecognized in American discourse." (pg 34)

The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood (2006) has been praised as a brilliant inquiry into why Palestinians have failed to win a state of their own. It has been called a welcome antidote to the propaganda and mythology that still dominate American discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Khalidi brilliantly analyses the structural handicap that hobbled the Palestinians throughout 30 years of British rule and patiently and eloquently covers the

whole of modern Palestinian history from World War I to the death of Yasser Arafat. *The Iron Cage* has been praised as "no exercise in victimology," as it is tough on the British, the Israelis, and the Americans, but Khalidi is scarcely less hard-hitting in appraising the Palestinians.

In *Brokers of Deceit* (2013), Khalidi delineates that the basic outlines for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process were laid down in 1978 by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin during the Camp David negotiations. They have determined US policy towards the peace process ever since and encompass the refusal of shared control of Jerusalem, allowing for the return of Palestinian refugees, and the granting of sovereignty over the occupied territories and their inhabitants to the Palestinians. According to Khalidi, the main outcome of the Madrid conference (1991), the Oslo process (1990s), and the peace initiative by US President Barack Obama (2009) was to buy time for Israel to consecrate its control over the Palestinians, expand settlements in the West Bank, and cut off East Jerusalem from the Palestinian hinterland. While Saudi Arabia could have anchored an Arab counterweight from the 1940's until the present, it preferred to remain quiet out of concern for its own security.

Khalidi points out that the establishment of the state of Israel resulted in "the uprooting of the world's oldest and most secure Jewish communities, which had found in the Arab lands a tolerance that, albeit imperfect, was nonexistent in the often genocidal, Jew-hating Christian West." Regarding the proposed two-state-solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, Khalidi has written that "the now universally applauded two-state solution faces the juggernaut of Israel's actions in the occupied territories over more than forty years, actions that have been expressly designed to make its realization in any meaningful form impossible."