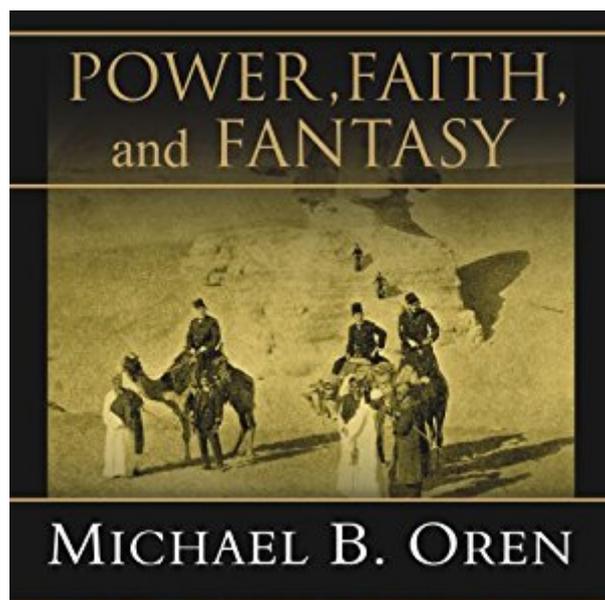


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Power, Faith, And Fantasy: America In The Middle East, 1776 To The Present



Synopsis

Will shape our thinking about America and the Middle East for years. Christopher Dickey, Newsweek Power, Faith, and Fantasy tells the remarkable story of America's 230-year relationship with the Middle East. Drawing on a vast range of government documents, personal correspondence, and the memoirs of merchants, missionaries, and travelers, Michael B. Oren narrates the unknown story of how the United States has interacted with this vibrant and turbulent region. 68 black-and-white photographs, 4 maps --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Michael Oren's book is both scholarly and very entertaining. That's usually a difficult combination to achieve, but one made easier for him by the dearth of previous books comprehensively covering U.S. relations with the Middle East since 1776. So there are plenty of "wow's", "really's" and "heh, I never imagined that's" in this book. They make it a lot of fun. But, though they are entertaining, this is also a very serious book. The "gee-whiz" aspect merely reveals how little most of us knew about an American engagement with the Middle East which began well before the epoch when American oil drillers struck it rich in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s. Those previous 150 years of history are well worth knowing. And they inform today, to include the fact that the current evangelical Christian romance with Israel dates not from the last 20 years or so, but has been a waxing and waning phenomenon for 150 years depending on the strength of religious revivalism in America. That

insight alone, which takes up a considerable part of the book, makes it well worth reading. The last fifth of the book is disappointing, but Mr. Oren is an honest man and in his preface practically tells you that it will be and that he really did not want to write it: it is the history of the Middle East from about 1950 on. He doesn't feel he has adequate (declassified government document) sources. It has a sort of breathless, once-over-lightly perfunctory approach suggesting he just wanted to get through it as quickly as possible. It also unhappily gives vent to two failures of objectivity on his part as an Israeli author who otherwise plays the history of Israeli/Arab conflicts remarkably straight: 1) his unqualified claim that the Israeli air attack on the U.S.

Few fields have been as well plowed as that of Middle East studies. Indeed, the ever expanding shelf in the bookstore on the topic groans under the weight of a torrent of new works, many which might be charitably described as derivative of already existing work. What a thrill then when a new book appears covering otherwise undisturbed ground! Michael Oren's excellent "Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present" is such a book. Instead of covering familiar subjects, Mr. Oren offers an insightful study of an area few consider, America's relationship to the Middle East in the 19th Century. Many will surely wonder at how any author can squeeze more than 600 pages - not including footnotes and bibliography -- over a topic that you might suspect could be covered in scant pages. Such is the wonderful surprise that Oren offers. In gripping prose that will be familiar with those who have already read his definitive history of the Six Day War, Oren traces America's involvement in the Middle East and North Africa all the way back to the Revolutionary War period. Philosophically and temperamentally committed to avoiding "old world entanglements" Thomas Jefferson, first as Washington's Secretary of State and then as President, confronts the question of what to do about American shipping seized by the petty north African Berber and Arab kingdoms. The Middle East a lucrative market, European states pay tribute to these states in exchange for "protection" a notion offensive to many early American statesman. Thus, having first resisted the creation of a standing navy, Jefferson reverses course in order to protect American shipping interests. Thus begins US involvement in the region. The study of this period provides much data of interest.

Michael Oren's book presents essential information for anybody who wants to understand the background for America's current policies and involvement in the Middle East. It is presented from a particular point of view, naturally. Oren is an American-born historian who lives in Israel and, of course, identifies with the Jewish State. He is a military reserve officer there (as is most of the

non-Orthodox adult male population) who has seen combat, and that has to color ones views, although given the historic disputatiousness of Israeli society, that doesn't necessarily dictate what those views will be. (We have to remember that Israel is a democracy in which there is lots of active dissent from the policies pursued by the government.) It is also an interesting datum that Oren opposed the U.S.'s current war in Iraq during the period prior to the invasion....At any event, I found this book endlessly fascinating. Oren knows how to tell a good story, and there are plenty of good stories packed in here. I was fascinated by the account of how American oil companies first got a foothold in the Middle East, at a time when the U.S. State Department was, according to Oren, pretty much oblivious to the potential significance of such engagement. And Oren's accounts of the travails of American Protestant missionaries working in the 19th century Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire are entertaining and instructive. To me, the last chapter of the book, recounting the history from after the foundation of the state of Israel to the present, is a big let-down.

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