Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present by Michael B. Oren

An Exciting Work Covering New Ground

“Will shape our thinking about America and the Middle East for years.”—Christopher Dickey, Newsweek

This best-selling history is the first fully comprehensive history of America's involvement in the Middle East from George Washington to George W. Bush. As Niall Ferguson writes, “If you think America’s entanglement in the Middle East began with Roosevelt and Truman, Michael Oren’s deeply researched and brilliantly written history will be a revelation to you, as it was to me. With its cast of fascinating characters—earnest missionaries, maverick converts, wide-eyed tourists, and even a nineteenth-century George Bush—Power, Faith, and Fantasy is not only a terrific read, it is also proof that you don’t really understand an issue until you know its history.” 68 black-and-white photographs, 4 maps

My Personal Review:
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. To take one example, Oren cites an early treaty with a north African Muslim state, signed when many of the Framers still lived, stating categorically that the United States was not a Christian nation. Likewise interesting, the American legation in Tangiers stands as the country's oldest. Oren follows the story through the 19th Century and the US involvement with the Ottoman Empire. Through it all, he likewise discusses the concept of Restorationism, that a Jewish State should be created in the area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, an idea with deep roots in American Protestantism. Indeed, readers who think themselves knowledgeable about diplomatic history, Zionism, and the Middle East, will likely find great surprise in learning about American missionary stations built for the very purpose of teaching Jews agricultural skills, well before Theodore Herzl's efforts. Marshalling considerable evidence, Oren argues that the US commitment to the notion of a Jewish state indeed far proceeds Israel's birth in 1948. Time and again one hears that America's relationship with Israel arises out of some nefarious political cabal warping national interest, in contrast Oren shows how such the heart of the relationship lies deep in America culture and character. Further to his credit, Oren flies through the modern period, ground well covered in other books.

Many of the issues covered will have a familiar ring to 21st century ears, such as presidents torn between cleaving to stabilizing power or siding with American ideals. Indeed, one often finds themselves wishing that Oren wrote prior to the invasion of Iraq, thus giving decision makers some much needed perspective. Nonetheless, readers will find themselves thrilled at all they can learn in this important work.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:

Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present by Michael B. Oren - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!