



Crescent Of Fire: Why The Islamic World Is Ablaze, And What We Can Do About It

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Looking at a map of the world, it is hard not to be struck by the arc of instability and conflict that has gripped the Islamic world, in sharp contrast to what is happening in the rest of the world, where the ideological and ethnic conflicts of the twentieth century have given way to a period of relative stability and growth. Furthermore, the violence that has gripped the Islamic world has diverted attention from what is arguably an even greater problem – the abject failure, in many of these countries, of governments to provide basic infrastructure for their citizens, and the prevalent economic stagnation that provides no opportunity for advancement except to the well-connected few, within systems that are hopelessly corrupt. The industrialization and consequent increase in human productivity that began in the eighteenth century in the west, and then moved out in the last century to other regions of the world, appears to have passed over the Muslim world, a substantial portion of which therefore faces a double punch of ideological conflict combined with economic backwardness.

Why have so many of these societies become so sadistically and senselessly violent? What is the source of this instability and conflict? Is it just an extremist fringe, or is it simply the most prominent part of a larger and more fundamental problem? Why did it start, what is keeping it going, and how can it be resolved? How did a religion that provided a framework for stability and advancement at one time get so misinterpreted and perverted? Even where there are no serious conflicts, why is it that Muslim countries seem incapable of achieving economic growth of the kind that has happened in the last few decades in Asia? Finally, what are the solutions? What should Muslim countries be doing in order to escape from this debilitating combination of instability and economic stagnation?

The reaction of many Muslims, when confronted with the problems in their midst, is to blame outside agencies and actors, whose baleful influence has somehow kept Muslims backwards for some nefarious purpose. The solution, it is further argued, is for Muslims to revive the united Islamic world that existed once upon a time, ruled by one Caliph, so that Muslims can regain the dominance that existed in the past. In the minds of many Muslims, the solutions therefore lie in the past; if Muslims could only bring back the Caliphate, everything would go back to normal.

The first part of this book therefore provides an overview of these exterior agencies or factors, whose actions, we are told, have led Muslims to their current predicament. It is argued that these agencies, though they may have contributed to the current situation, are not the root of the problem; they are at worst the effects, not the cause. The next part of this book then shifts its focus to the Caliphate, arguing that, for most of its history, the Caliphate has not only been a dismal failure, it came complete with a fundamental problem at its heart, which not only doomed it right from the start, but also makes it impractical as an institution for resolving the problems that the Muslim world faces today.

The third part of the book starts addressing and analyzing the real root of the problem. This portion of the book is more disjointed and almost vignette-like in its approach as compared to the previous part, because the root can only be elucidated and explained by approaching its many facets from different directions in order to get a feel for the whole. The concluding chapter of this part serves to bring all these facets together, and sets the stage for the last part, which puts forward a framework for the solution to the crisis. As the solution offered is one of pragmatism combined with an emphasis on economic development, this last and longest part of the book needs to carefully lay the groundwork for what is being proposed, because it has to be justified and defended as a solution.

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