



Islamic Imperialism: A History

By Efraim Karsh

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From the first Arab-Islamic Empire of the mid-seventh century to the Ottomans, the last great Muslim empire, the story of the Middle East has been the story of the rise and fall of universal empires and, no less important, of imperialist dreams. So argues Efraim Karsh in this highly provocative book. Rejecting the conventional Western interpretation of Middle Eastern history as an offshoot of global power politics, Karsh contends that the region's experience is the culmination of long-existing indigenous trends, passions, and patterns of behavior, and that foremost among these is Islam's millenarian imperial tradition. The author explores the history of Islam's imperialism and the persistence of the Ottoman imperialist dream that outlasted World War I to haunt Islamic and Middle Eastern politics to the present day. September 11 can be seen as simply the latest expression of this dream, and such attacks have little to do with U.S. international behavior or policy in the Middle East, says Karsh. The House of Islam's war for world mastery is traditional, indeed venerable, and it is a quest that is far from over.

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Editorial Review

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Middle East scholar Karsh surveys for a general audience the region's Islamic political past. Parallel to his narrative, Karsh frequently contrasts the universalistic proclamations of Islam with cycles of imperial consolidation and fragmentation. After recounting the Prophet Muhammad's religio-political establishment of Islam, and the discord about his legacy that continues today, Karsh narrates the battles over Muhammad's caliphate that eventuated in the Umayyad and Abbasid Empires. Karsh's commentary often looks forward to contemporary ideologues of Islam who ransack history to justify grievances. In Karsh's coverage, the irruption of the Crusaders into the Levant hardly provoked a jihad to eject them; that occurred, in his account, through politically ordinary processes of empire building, eventually by the celebrated Saladin. Islamic unity and zeal, however, had always to be affirmed by reestablishers of the caliphate, a theme Karsh incorporates into his chronicling of the rise and decline of the Ottoman Empire, the distribution of its territories after World War I, and varieties of pan-Arabism prevalent after World War II. An informative foundation for further exploration of Islamic history. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"Anyone interested in the debate about the place of Islam in the modern world should read this book... Karsh offers a new approach. He rejects the condescending approach of the apologists and the hateful passion of the Islamophobes. Instead he presents Islam as a rival for Western civilization in what is, after all, a contest for shaping the future of mankind.' Amir Taheri, The Sunday Telegraph 'His narrative helps explain the rage and the sheer hopelessness of so much Muslim engagement with modern politics.' Charles Moore, The Telegraph 'Karsh has produced an impeccable history of how the Muslim mainstream has behaved towards its neighbours... I could not recommend this magnificent effort of reportage and analysis more highly. Efraim Karsh, Professor of Mediterranean Studies at King's College London, is well on his way toward claiming the crown of a new generation of scholars of Islam and I wish him luck. We need him.' Hazhir Teimourian, Literary Review"

About the Author

Efraim Karsh is professor and head of the Mediterranean Studies Programme, King's College, University of London.

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