



## Longitudes and Attitudes

Exploring the World After September 11

by Thomas L. Friedman  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux © 2002  
383 pages

### Focus

Leadership  
Strategy  
Sales & Marketing  
Corporate Finance  
Human Resources  
Technology  
Production & Logistics  
Small Business  
▶ **Economics & Politics**  
Industries & Regions  
Career Development  
Personal Finance  
Self Improvement  
Ideas & Trends

### Take-Aways

- The primary contributor to 9/11 was that the United States had lost the credibility of its deterrence because prior attacks against it went unpunished.
- Lack of democracy and economic efficiency force Middle Eastern governments to deflect criticism by allowing media and academic attacks against the U.S.
- Saudi Arabia, the Taliban's biggest funder, has revealed little about its 9/11 hijackers.
- Immediately after 9/11, the Saudi Embassy rushed bin Laden's kin out of the U.S.
- Saudi royals bargained with the fundamentalists: if they did not challenge the regime, they could fundraise for bin Laden and preach hatred of the U.S. and Israel.
- Since 1980, Saudi Arabia's population has tripled as oil revenue has dropped by half.
- Islam is a religion of compassion, but never developed tolerance of other religions.
- Arab governments faced their own conflicts with fundamentalist religious movements in the 1980s, and crushed them without mercy.
- Palestinian issues dominate the Middle East, but education and other vital needs are ignored.
- The 9/11 hijackers left no demands because their act was their demand: they demand the destruction of the U.S. and the modern civilization of tolerance that it represents.

### Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>

## Relevance

### What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) How 9/11 fits the super story of globalization and religious intolerance; 2) The inside conflicts in Saudi Arabia; 3) Common Middle East myths and 4) How corrupt Arab regimes use the U.S. as a lightning rod for malcontents to dreadful effect.

### Recommendation

If *The New York Times* were a high school yearbook, Thomas Friedman would be “Most Likely To Succeed.” For more than two decades, he has trained his agile, disciplined mind on unraveling the palace intrigue and radical movements of Middle Eastern politics. He tells a story about a waitress in chaotic, war-torn Beirut, who politely asked if he would rather have desert now or wait until the ceasefire took effect. His point: humans can adapt to virtually anything. In this compendium of columns plus a diary of post-9/11 events, Friedman argues that 9/11 stemmed from U.S. failure to retaliate against prior terrorism. Here, he kicks over the log and shines his light on the origins of the religious intolerance that created 9/11. It’s not a pretty sight, but you had better look. To be even modestly informed about today’s issues, *getAbstract.com* maintains, you need to read this.

## Abstract

### America’s Lost Turkey

A timeless Bedouin legend offers poignant commentary on the terrorist threat now facing the United States and, indeed, the world.

An elderly Bedouin leader thought that he could restore his virility by eating turkey. One day, thieves steal the turkey he was fattening. The elder gathers his sons and orders that at all costs the turkey must be recovered, but his children ignore him, failing to see the urgency. A month later, someone steals the old man’s camel. “What should we do about the camel?” the sons ask. “We’ve got to get my turkey back,” the elder replies. The sons don’t see the connection and ignore him again. Finally, a few weeks later, the old man’s daughter is raped. “This is all because of the turkey,” he chastised his sons. “Once they realized they could take my turkey, everything was lost.”

After years of allowing terrorism to continue without really punishing the offenders, America lost its turkey. For two decades, the West allowed the forces of intolerance to mount attacks — embassy bombings, hijackings — without consequence. The horrors of September 11, 2001, were the part of America’s failure to get its turkey back.

President George Bush’s “axis of evil” characterization was widely criticized as poorly thought out. It was — and therein lies its value. It tells the legion of terrorists now cooking up chemical mayhem that, if you think you’re crazy, meet Donald Rumsfeld — he’s even crazier than you are. This administration’s willingness to restore U.S. deterrence, even at the risk of seeming rash or unpredictable, is the only way for the U.S. to ever get its turkey back.

### The Super Story

The 9/11 tragedy fits into the super story, the large scale context, of globalization. International division and the U.S.-U.S.S.R. balance characterized the Cold War system.

“These terrorists aren’t out for a new kind of coexistence with us. They are out for our nonexistence.”

“America today is the Michael Jordan of geopolitics. Many envy the institutions and economy that ensure our dominance; others deeply resent us for the same. All understand, at some level, that the stability of the world today rests on the ability of our system and economy to endure.”

“We must now fight a war against terrorists who are crazy and evil but who, it grieves me to say, reflect the mood in their home countries more than we might think.”

“What troubles me most about the mood on the Arab street today is the hostility I detect there to modernization, globalization, democratization, and the information revolution.”

“I hope one day soon I will see an intifada not only for an independent Palestine but for Arab education, for an Arab free press, for Arab legality, for Arab democracy.”

But, the post-Cold War system is defined by integration, globalization and more complex balances, including between nation-states and individuals. Osama bin Laden shows how globalization can be a “force multiplier” for “super-empowered” individuals unmediated by a state. In 1998, the U.S. launched 75, million-dollar cruise missiles at a single person, bin Laden, following the bombing of two American embassies in Africa. This was history’s first battle between a superpower and a super-empowered individual. September 11 was the second.

### **Saudi Arabia**

The bloated Saudi Arabian monarchy is enigmatic. Fifteen of the 19 suicide bombers were Saudi nationals, and Osama Bin Laden himself is a Saudi of Yemenite extraction. But, what is behind Saudi discontent? Geopolitically, Saudi Arabia’s population has exploded from seven million in 1980 to 19 million today. Per capita oil income, meanwhile, has fallen from \$19,000 during the 1981 oil boom to about \$7,300 today. Previously, the desk clerks at any Saudi hotel were foreign nationals — no self-respecting Saudi would have the job. Now, Saudis are happy to just have a job. Moreover, 40 percent of the population is under 14. In terms of political stability, Saudi Arabia’s demographics are a royal family’s nightmare.

The de facto leader of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Abdullah, would like to modernize his country. He recently proposed, for example, that Saudi Arabian women should be allowed to drive automobiles. This would negate the need for some half a million expatriate chauffeurs. Traditionalists blocked his reform, however, and Saudi woman are still not permitted to drive.

Almost all 15 Saudi hijackers came from Asir, a poor region undergoing socially disruptive modernization. The Saudis have refused to explain the hijackers’ backgrounds or motivations. Yet, a U.S. hospital worker there reportedly saw Saudi doctors and nurses celebrating 9/11.

The Saudis whisper to American politicians that they are allies, but they cannot make that declaration to their own people. After all, Saudi Arabia is run by a monarchy. How could they cast their lot with the U.S., when the U.S. stands for maintaining and advancing freedom, and the goal of the Saudi royal family is simply its own preservation?

### **Myths of the Middle East**

- Myth 1: The hijackers were angry about U.S. support of Israel — Osama bin Laden stated that he was motivated by a desire to drive the U.S. out of Saudi Arabia, and to topple the corrupt Saudi royal family. The Palestinians were an after thought.
- Myth 2: The Arab countries are rich — In the early ‘50s, South Korea’s economy was roughly the size of Syria or Egypt. Now it is a highly developed country, but Syria and Egypt are still developing. True, the Middle East has struggled with Israel, but South Korea struggled with North Korea. Another excuse is Arab population problems, but China, which is growing 10 percent annually, faces that issue also.
- Myth 3: The U.S. impeded peace for Palestinians in the attackers’ opinion — The September 11 attack was planned about a year ahead, even as Bill Clinton proposed a Palestinian state with 95 percent of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This suggests terrorism came because the U.S. helped coexistence, rather than prevented it.
- Myth 4: Arab newspapers’ hatred toward the U.S. is beyond the control of Arab government — Actually, Arab newspapers are all government controlled and licensed. A recent editorial by the Mubarek-appointed editor of the semiofficial Egyptian

“An Arab street that can ask only one question will, in the end, not be a very nice place to raise your kids.”

“From here forward, it’s the bad guys who need to be afraid every waking moment. The more frightened our enemies are today, the fewer we will have to fight tomorrow.”

“The terrorists who hit the United States are people who pray to the God of Hate.”

“Their terrorism is not aimed at reversing any specific U.S. policy. Indeed, they made no demands. Their terrorism is driven by pure hatred and nihilism, and its targets are the institutions that undergird America’s way of life, from our markets to our military.”

daily, *Al-Ahram*, cited unspecified reports accusing the U.S. of dropping poisoned food to Afghans and deliberately dropping food supplies into land mine fields.

- Myth 5: We are warring against terrorism — While WWII was a battle against secular totalitarianism (Nazism and Communism), WWII is a struggle against religious totalitarianism which says my faith can only rule supreme if all others are smothered. Terrorism is a tool of that intolerance. The opposite of religious totalitarianism is the ideology of pluralism, so the U.S. — the world’s prime example of tolerance — therefore draws bin Laden’s hatred and must be destroyed.
- Myth 6: Islam is a religion of war — Islam has a deep moral note of compassion, charity and fairness. However, unlike Judaism and Christianity, it has not developed a dominant philosophy that permits equal recognition or treatment of alternative faiths. The challenge facing Islamic nations is how to accept pluralism and modern life and, yet, still be sincerely, passionately and devoutly Muslim.
- Myth 7: No one could have predicted 9/11 — Actually, September 11 occurred because the U.S. lost its deterrent capability. For 20 years, America failed to bring people to justice after they murdered Americans. The incidents run from the suicide bombing of the Beirut U.S. Embassy in April, 1983, to the bombing of the Beirut airport Marine barracks months later, the TWA hijacking, the murder of U.S. troops at Khobar Towers and the U.S.S. Cole attack in Yemen. In each case, the U.S. failed to respond decisively. Terrorists concluded that it was soft, that they could “out-crazy” Americans and that U.S. politicians would always listen to the Europeans and opt for “constructive engagement” with rogues rather than smash a fist in their faces.
- Myth 8: U.S. support for Israel is unequivocal — If the Palestinians get their “peace act” together, Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon must realize that the U.S. is out to make the world safe for Israel to be free, but not free to occupy the West Bank according to his biblical map.
- Myth 9: Palestinians are fighting for a state — While true, that’s not all they want. The U.S. Camp David peace plan would have given Yassir Arafat more than 90 percent of what he’s fighting for, but Palestinians found the offer unacceptable. That did not justify an *intifada* of suicide bombers marching into Jerusalem.

### Hama Rules

When their governments were faced with fundamentalist threats, Syria, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia responded fundamentally. They crushed them without mercy at the cost of thousands of civilian lives. In February 1982, President Hafez al-Assad’s secular government used artillery against its fourth-largest city, Hama, because it harbored fundamentalists. Amnesty International estimated that 10,000 to 25,000 Syrians died, mostly civilians. America faces the fallout from those brutal crackdowns, in three ways:

1. Fundamentalists forced from their homelands fled to wild, uncontrolled regions where they could continue their mayhem — Afghanistan and Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley.
2. Some Arab regimes, principally the Saudis, struck pacts with the devil with the fundamentalists. If the fundamentalists did not attack the Royal Family, the Saud family permitted them to continue raising money. Supposedly the money went to Muslim welfare groups, but in reality it was funneled to bin Laden’s organization.
3. Insecure after their Islamist crackdowns, these dictatorships divert attention from themselves by allowing their press and their intellectuals total freedom to attack the U.S. and Israel, making them lightning rods for the frustration of repressed Muslims.

Thus, a generation of Muslims and Arabs hate America — even though the U.S. gives Egypt \$2 billion a year and defended Muslim freedom in Kuwait, Bosnia and Kosovo;

“They only had to destroy. We, by contrast, have to fight in a way that is effective without destroying the very open society we are trying to protect.”

“The fact is no region in the world, including sub-Saharan Africa, has fewer freely elected governments than the Arab-Muslim world, which has none. Why?”

even though President Clinton met with Arafat more than any other foreign leader; the U.S. was the largest pre-war provider of aid to Afghanistan and has been the architect of its reconstruction. Unaware of all this, the average Muslim is either likely to applaud the 9/11 attack or to believe it was a CIA-Mossad conspiracy to embarrass the Muslim world.

The terrorists have a constant refrain: America is a country of wealth and power but no values. The U.S. is a godless nation, indeed, the enemy of God. Americans’ wealth and power are not products of their values and, indeed, Americans believe you must give up your values to achieve wealth. This image may stem from what they see of their leaders, such as in Saudi Arabia, where many wealthy and powerful people live estranged from their professed faith. Middle Eastern nations encourage this negative view of Americans to explain their own failure to give their people better lives. Instead of exposing their regimes to criticism, they show America as godless. When you are the enemy of God, the logic goes, you deserve to die.

### One Country and Two Futures

The possible models for the future of Saudi Arabia are the Soviet school and the China school. The Soviet school holds that Saudi Arabia’s absolute rulers, like the leaders of the old U.S.S.R., cannot be reformed, and neither can the marriage between the corrupt al-Saud family and ultraconservative Wahhabi religious leaders. Just as the U.S.S.R. competed with China to dominate the Communist world, the Saudis bitterly compete with Iran to dominate the Muslim world. The Soviet school says Saudi Arabia has about five years before its declining per capita income and ballooning population, stirred up by satellite TV and the Web, cause a Soviet-style implosion.

The China school says Saudi Arabia makes no sense viewed literally, based on its professed rules, but it finds a pragmatic way to work despite its strictures. China’s conflict is capitalism vs. communism, while Saudi Arabia’s is modernism vs. Wahhabism. Crown Prince Abdullah is like a reformist Chinese prime minister, pushing his land to adapt to evolving realities. The winning school will determine the future of Saudi Arabia and, perhaps, the entire Middle East.

## About The Author

Nationally syndicated columnist [Thomas L. Friedman](#) is arguably the leading journalistic mind reporting on the Middle East and Israel. On three occasions, he has won the Pulitzer Prize for his work at The New York Times. He has written two best-selling books: *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, which won the National Book Award for nonfiction; and *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*. He resides in Bethesda, Maryland.

## Buzz-Words

Hama rules / Russian school / Soviet school / Super-empowered individual / Wahhabism