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Setback of the Century: 11th September Cracks on the Mirrors of the Iraq War

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Xlibris
Unknown $0.00 (pp)
978-1-4568-9174-9

"Fires, blood and foreign heavy shoes on the soil of nations do not make a new civilized relationship based on love of convergence," laments Fatih Abdulsalam, an Iraqi journalist and editor-in-chief of an Arabic newspaper based in London. His heartfelt tone of sadness, anger, and frustration over the devastation inflicted upon his native land by an American president opens and closes this political treatise. However, *Setback of the Century* is not simply an indictment of Bush and the neoconservatives. The former he derides as "the biggest warmonger," the latter as being "obsessed with war."

Adbulsalam writes more about the future than of the immediate past or present. His book focuses on the self-imposed restrictions that continue to impede the progress of the world's billion-plus Muslims. While his view of the United States is one of disappointment over its "subjugation of others by military force," it is the Arab ruling elite's imposition of "internal barriers" that "stall enlightenment" for which he reserves his strongest ire.

Abdulsalam's work provides many valuable insights into what this once-great culture has done to hold itself back. It is the Arabs themselves whom the author blames for the sorry state of science, art, literature, education, and social and political progress in the Muslim world. Generations of repression, he notes, have left most intellectuals marginalized in this "ongoing war for the Arab psyche." Abdulsalam is of the opinion that too many look backward rather than forward, and to those he says, "We cannot convince others of our greatness by deeds of the past."

Abdulsalam believes that the "popular masses" of the Islamic world still see the nations of the West—and America in particular—as "lighthouses" to guide them toward the path of hope. At the same time, many remain "scared of globalization because it exports ideas to them besides material products." Fear often wins out over hope, explains the author, and that, in his opinion, is why many following Islam are now "relying on religious beliefs that give no chance to free thinking."

The insights, opinions, and proposals for change presented in *Setback of the Century* should make it essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand this year's Arab Spring, the Muslim culture, or challenges the United States and the West face in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other nations. Unfortunately, the prose is dense, confusing, and awkward. Its many run-on sentences, spelling and grammatical errors, and malapropisms make mining Abdulsalam's political insights a tremendous chore and difficult to read. Whole paragraphs and even entire pages are indecipherable. Abdulsalam's work is too important to be lost to insufficient editing and a bad translation.
MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (February 17, 2012)

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