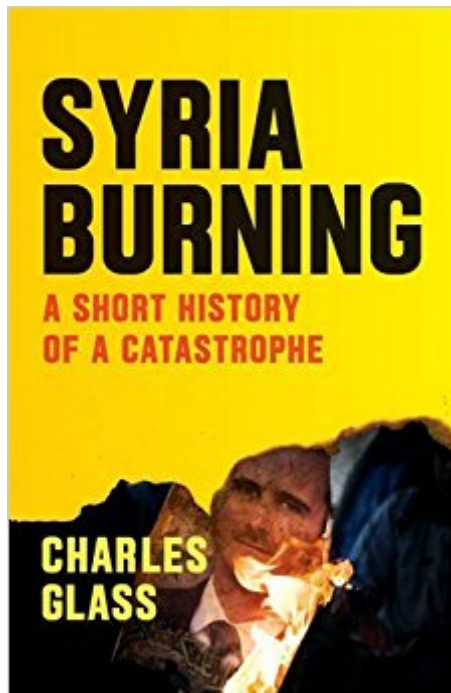




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Syria Burning: A Short History Of A Catastrophe



Synopsis

What are the origins of the Syrian crisis, and why did no one do anything to stop it? Since the upsurge of the Arab Spring in 2011, the Syrian civil war has claimed in excess of 200,000 lives, with an estimated 8 million Syrians, more than a third of the country's population, forced to flee their homes. Militant Sunni groups, such as ISIS, have taken control of large swathes of the nation. The impact of this catastrophe is now being felt on the streets of Europe and the United States. Veteran Middle East expert Charles Glass combines reportage, analysis, and history to provide an accessible overview of the origins and permutations defining the conflict. He also gives a powerful argument for why the West has failed to get to grips with the consequences of the crisis.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Tells us more about the reality of Syria and its future than could be gained from any other single source." —Patrick Cockburn, from the foreword
"More than ever in the era of 24-hour sound-bite news, events demand the long view if they are to be explicable. With his deep experience of the Levant, that is exactly what Charlie Glass offers the student of the Middle East in this timely, elegant and penetrating study of turmoil that has reshaped the region."
—Alan Cowell, former Middle East Bureau Chief, New York Times
"If news moves fast, assessments have not, which is one reason why we should all read Syria Burning [But] there is another, better reason to read this book. Glass has been traveling in and writing about the Middle East since the 1980s his view on how the conflict has escalated and why it has not taken the turns many others anticipated make for enlightening reading."

•The Observer •“Read Syria Burning to understand why the Assad regime was uniquely prepared and determined to resist the winds of change, even if the war doubtless marks the end of a century of post-Ottoman history.” • Jonathan Randal, author of The Tragedy of Lebanon •“Cutting through the misrepresentation that plagues most media coverage of the region, Glass clearly explains the current conflict, drawing on his extensive reporting experience in Syria.” •In These Times •“Glass offers a brief but necessary look at the country’s past.” •History News Network •“Glass has tackled an enormously complex war and its context | If we learned and took to the heart the history outlined in Syria Burning, perhaps we wouldn’t repeat it.” •Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Charles Glass is an author, journalist and broadcaster, who specializes in the Middle East. He made headlines when taken hostage for 62 days in Lebanon by Shi’a militants in 1987, while writing a book during his time as ABC News’s chief Middle East correspondent. He writes regularly for the New York Review of Books, Harper’s, the London Review of Books and the Spectator. He is the author of Tribes with Flags, Money for Old Rope, The Tribes Triumphant, The Northern Front, Americans in Paris, and Deserters: A Hidden History of World War II.

A sad, sad story. Nothing unexpected. Why cannot we leave these countries alone to sort out their own affairs? I found it quite difficult to follow the historic time line. While I had absorbed a little information on the various tribes and factions involved, some sort of glossary could have helped a better understanding of the events leading to the present impasse.

Good overview of the situation. For those wanting a more in depth discussion, this is just not quite enough. For the length, a very good start.

Years ago I read Charles Glass’ excellent book Tribes With Flags about Lebanon and Syria. Since I liked Glass’ previous work, I ordered this book directly from the publisher since it was not available at the time from . The first thing to realize about this book is that it’s really a pamphlet, rather than a book. And an expensive pamphlet at that. When it arrived I was shocked by its small size. It’s something like 5" x 4". Charles Glass is without question an expert on Syria and the book focuses almost entirely on Syria and the roots of the Syrian uprising against Bashar Assad. There is also a long digression on the history of Syrian uprisings against various occupiers, especially the

French. Glass went to Syria in 2013 and 2014. Or at least the areas like Damascus where he could go with some measure of safety. He provides some interesting background on the Syrian uprising, from peaceful protest, to armed resistance, to a movement that is dominated by Islamic fundamentalists. Although ISIS is in the sub-title, the book is weak in its discussion of ISIS. ISIS does occupy part of Syria and it had its roots in an Al-Qaeda faction in Syria. But ISIS as the West is fighting it is something that came from Iraq, not Syria. A number of other authors have noted that ISIS is a reaction to the Shia domination of Iraq and the Shia death squads. As horrible as ISIS is, many Sunnis have chosen to ally with ISIS because it is a better option than more certain death at the hands of Shia death squads. The Iraqi dimension of ISIS is largely ignored by Glass' focus on Syria. For a reader wanting to read about ISIS, this book is a weak and expensive choice. With the long historical digressions, there is little substance in this book.

You'll probably see some reviewers/readers griping about this book's length (short) relative to its price (full size); all I can say is that you'll get full value for your money. What Charles Glass is delivering here is a coherent analysis of what has happened in Syria since the first protestors assembled in Dera'a in early 2011 to demand that some teenagers who had scrawled anti-regime graffiti (and been arrested and tortured) be released. More rapidly than now seems credible, what seemed at first yet another example of the Arab Spring was seized on by a variety of factions, first by armed opponents to the regime of Syria's dictator/president Bashar al-Assad, and then by external forces of various kinds, who funded and armed those opponents. Britain, France, Russia, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the US -- all have been meddling in the fate of the country. As Glass writes, "would it be churlish to suggest that Syria's friends want something from Syria for themselves? You know the answers. So do the Syrians." One of the strengths of this slim book is that Glass is able to draw historical parallels (as and when they are appropriate) and point to historical reasons for Syrian wariness of Turkey, Britain and France, to name only a few countries. He can and does show how Syria's history as a multicultural society evolved, and why it is now collapsing as civil war inexorably reinforces sectarian tensions. He discusses such diverse topics as the collapse of order in Aleppo, the nature of the Alawites (the group to which the Assad family belongs) and the history of Armenians within Syria, and provides ample first-hand observations from those he has encountered during his various trips to the country over the years. If you're looking for a book about ISIS, this isn't it. (There are several perfectly good books on that broader topic, now.) If you're looking for a primer on what has happened within Syria, specifically, and why events there didn't follow the path they did in Tunisia, Libya or Egypt in 2011, but took such a violent and

catastrophic turn, destabilizing the region still further, this succinct narrative is just what you'll need. It's admirably unbiased in that it holds almost everyone accountable and responsible, except for the average man in the street who, after decades of living in a totalitarian state, found himself in an arguably far worse and more perilous position: living in a chaotic world of civil war. Highly recommended for anyone trying to break through the noise and propaganda and above all, trying to obtain a broader historical context for it all, from Ottoman rule to the infamous Sykes-Picot agreement and onward.

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