

What Are the Immutable Principles Governing the Fall of Great Civilizations?

On the morning of September 12, 2001, the day after the attacks which killed more people than were lost at Pearl Harbor, I was on my rather long commute to my job in California's "Silicon Valley" when it suddenly dawned on me - we're at war! (By that time, albeit only 24 hours after the first aircraft struck the Tower 1 of the World Trade Center, it was already known that the attackers were alien Muslims and that they had, in all probability, been commissioned by Osama bin Laden.) I next wondered how many other bands of Muslim terrorists there were in our midst poised to launch even more dramatic attacks. How many follow-on attacks would there be and how rapidly would they follow? How many millions of radical Muslims might be plotting our demise and could they use WMD's to do so?

Like many Americans, I presume, I took the 9/11 attacks personally. Seeing my fellow American men and women leap from those 100-story burning buildings caused me to begin a decade-long journey to find out why Muslims attacked us, danced in the streets at seeing the coverage, and what were the underpinnings of their rage. More specifically, because all great civilizations one-day fail, I wanted to find out if, and how, they might destroy us.



This began a ten-year odyssey writing *Lessons from Fallen Civilizations*, where I attempted to discover causation in history, more specifically, the subset of causes which contribute to the fall of civilizations. I studied and chronicled the fall of five great civilizations, the Greek Polis, Carthage, Rome (in the West), Byzantium (which I refer to as the fall of the Christian Middle East) and the Ottoman Empire. This portion of *Lessons from Fallen Civilizations* begins at the battle of Marathon in 490 BC and ends in 1918 at the end of World War II. The main character, or protagonist, is Western Civilization. With the fall of Byzantium/the Christian Middle East, I chronicle also the rise of militant Islam. And with the Ottomans, I give you the fall of the last great Islamic caliphate. In the final third of the book, I chronicle the rise of what I call Resurgent Militant Islam, culminating with 9/11, the war in Afghanistan and what we must do to avoid defeat by the Islamists.

In my research, I emphasized original sources including two men, both ancient Greeks, who are credited with having invented the craft of modern history writing, Herodotus and Thucydides. With respect to Herodotus, he is the first westerner to seek to find causation in human events. From Thucydides, we get the admonition - those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. While I don't disagree with the substance of this bit of conventional wisdom, it is not exactly what Thucydides held. Instead he wrote that history does repeat because human nature changes little, generation over generation. And to demonstrate this phenomenon, he developed a set of Immutable principles which govern the affairs of men. For example, from him we get the indisputable notions:

Weakness invites the domination of the stronger
Power always seeks to increase itself
Necessity is the engine of history

As Thucydides was my mentor, I developed the following set of Immutables which from my research both govern the fall of great civilizations and can be seen to repeat over the millennia. Please note that for each of the following Immutables there is a reference to my original book and a modern corollary.¹

¹ The following descriptions of my Immutables appear in the Introduction of *Lessons from Fallen Civilizations*. I am adding them here for the benefit of the reader who has not yet read the first book.