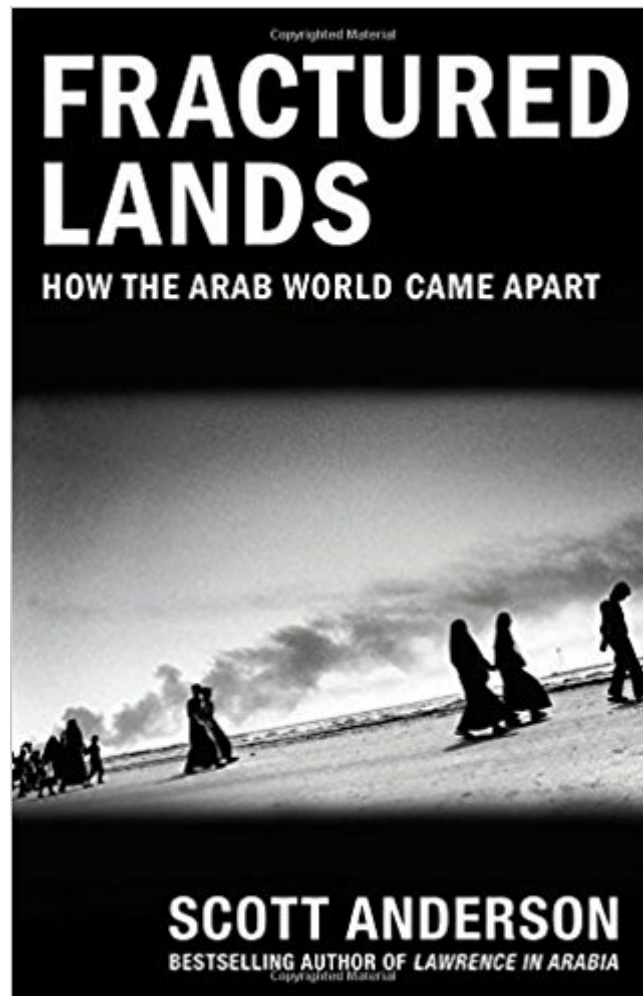




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# Fractured Lands: How The Arab World Came Apart



## Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *Lawrence in Arabia*, a piercing account of how the contemporary Arab world came to be riven by catastrophe since the 2003 United States invasion of Iraq. In 2011, a series of anti-government uprisings shook the Middle East and North Africa in what would become known as the Arab Spring. Few could predict that these convulsions, initially hailed in the West as a triumph of democracy, would give way to brutal civil war, the terrors of the Islamic State, and a global refugee crisis. But, as New York Times bestselling author Scott Anderson shows, the seeds of catastrophe had been sown long before. In this gripping account, Anderson examines the myriad complex causes of the region's profound unraveling, tracing the ideological conflicts of the present to their origins in the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003 and beyond. From this investigation emerges a rare view into a land in upheaval through the eyes of six individuals: the matriarch of a dissident Egyptian family; a Libyan Air Force cadet with divided loyalties; a Kurdish physician from a prominent warrior clan; a Syrian university student caught in civil war; an Iraqi activist for women's rights; and an Iraqi day laborer-turned-ISIS fighter. A probing and insightful work of reportage, *Fractured Lands* offers a penetrating portrait of the contemporary Arab world and brings the stunning realities of an unprecedented geopolitical tragedy into crystalline focus.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Fantastic." • PBS Newshour "A mammoth undertaking. . . . A fascinating look into the region's history, the forces of tribalism, and the global implications

of an Arab world in revolt. • Charlie Rose

Scott Anderson is a veteran war correspondent who has reported from Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Northern Ireland, Chechnya, Sudan, Bosnia, El Salvador and many other strife-torn countries. A frequent contributor to the New York Times Magazine, his work has also appeared in Vanity Fair, Esquire, Harper's and Outside. He is the author of novels Moonlight Hotel and Triage and of non-fiction books Lawrence in Arabia, The Man Who Tried to Save the World and The 4 O'Clock Murders, and co-author of War Zones and Inside The League with his brother Jon Lee Anderson.

Fractured Lands is not only well-written and engaging, but also provides a well structured and relatively bias-free overview of the events in the past few years via the stories of a few individuals. I like to think of myself as well informed, as I keep abreast of the daily news from several different sources and have for years. But the middle east has been in such a constant state of flux that its certainly been hard to keep all of the events straight. This book did a great job of bringing the events of the past 16 years or so together in a cohesive and sensible timeline. I mentioned that the book is relatively bias-free - I think this statement needs a bit more explanation. As the book is centered around interviews with different people from the region there is obviously bias in the ways their stories are presented and what those stories imply about the regimes they lived under. However I think that Mr. Anderson does an excellent job of separating fact from bias, and allows the events and stories to speak for themselves (which, as a trained journalist, one would expect of him). He doesn't engage in any 'editorializing' himself until the last chapter, and this thoughts are worth giving serious consideration to given his wide experience in the region. Overall I think this is an important book for anyone even remotely interested in current events or the middle east to read. I will give one disclaimer: this isn't a 'history' book - it gives a 1000 foot view of events from WWI onwards. It doesn't go into great detail with any particular event. What it does is provides a great overview of events and humanizes the whole terrible situation via the people we meet through Mr. Anderson's interviews.

I agree with those who think that this book is too short, and that this is something that--of necessity--winds up leaving out too much of the history, and sometimes omitting or simplifying complexities and parallels. There is a lot to be learned from looking at the racist, anthropologically ignorant post-WWI creation of Iraq in a larger frame that includes the partition of India, another

multi-faceted disaster that resulted in separation of families, many, many deaths, lingering resentment, and global instability. But including more of the history, and discussion of parallels, would obviously have greatly increased the length (and complexity) of the book. Some readers would have preferred that; I am one of them. But I am sure that many potential readers would have been deterred. And, clearly, that would not be a good thing. I am always uncomfortable with relying on a small set of personal stories to do much argumentative work. I understand that including such stories concretizes many of the larger issues for some readers, and humanizes them. But--as with most if not virtually all ethnographies--it is unclear what probative value the author--or the reader--is supposed to attach to the stories. My discontents should not obscure the bottom line, however: This is a short, deeply sobering, well-written, and highly readable book.

The events of Syria and Libya and Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan, etc. etc. are so overwhelming and seemingly getting worse with no prospect of ever getting better. I cannot even bring myself to read newspaper articles about the subject, it's all I can do just to watch brief TV news reports. But it's important and whether we want to be or not, we are involved. It's far too late to imagine that we can stay out of the conflicts and their fallout. When I study history, I can't really get too excited about learning military strategy or which emperor conquered which land, but I am interested in how events have affected the individuals who have to try to live their lives somehow. In *Fractured Lands*, journalist Scott Anderson zeroes in on six individuals who were caught up in the upheavals and he describes how they lived their lives. Some were politically involved, others just wanted to pretend life was normal or at least going to be peaceful and normal soon. Some were determined to stay in their homes, others found themselves refugees, maybe briefly, maybe for the rest of their lives. I was especially fascinated by the stories of the Egyptian dissident and the Iraqi activist. It's quite a short book and I could have read about more of the people behind the headlines.

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