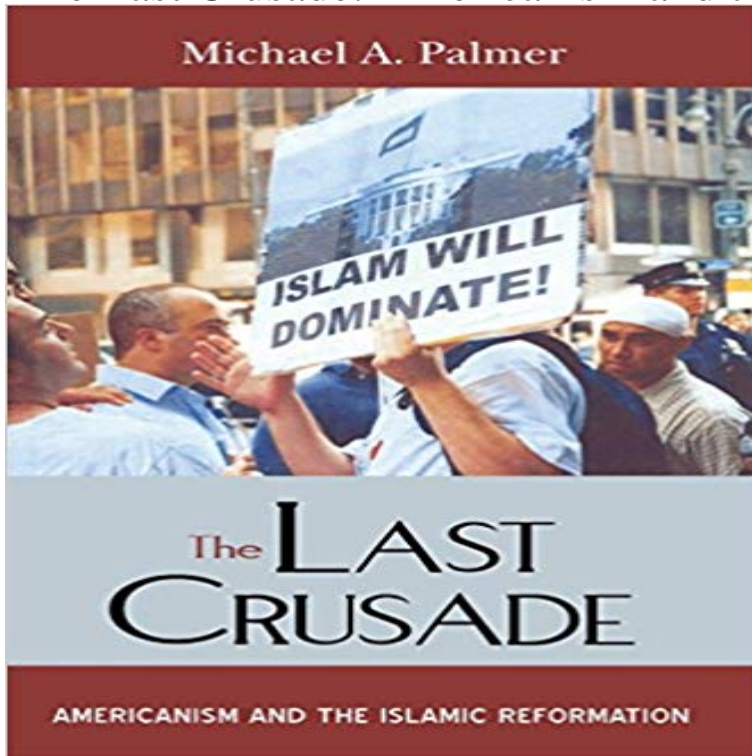


The Last Crusade: Americanism and the Islamic Reformation



The United States, argues Michael A. Palmer, is engaged in a political crusade to modernize the Islamic world. Americanism is in the vanguard of modernity's relentless advance, promoting capitalist markets and democratic institutions. To compete, Islamic societies must adopt a more secular and material approach, as have the West and South and East Asia. But these principles conflict with Islamic fundamentals. Once a vibrant force, much of the Muslim world spent four centuries as prisoner of an Ottoman Empire that embraced feudalism while the West jettisoned it. In the absence of a renaissance or enlightenment, modernization in the Islamic world has been painful and unsuccessful. While many in the West long for an Islamic reformation, Palmer argues that Islamists such as Osama bin Laden are the face of that reformation. Just as Protestant reformers sought a return to the purity of early Christianity, jihadists desire a return to the halcyon days of conquest and expansion, when the Caliphate controlled a united and powerful Muslim community. American actions have not provoked this conflict, nor can American withdrawal end it, Palmer contends. For example, China, also a once-powerful civilization subjected to Western imperialism, has not produced homicide bombers. Instead, the Chinese are busy modernizing. Islam's failure to modernize is the root cause of the current situation. Bin Laden and other jihadists understand, correctly, that if Islam is to avoid the materialism and secularism that come with modernity, they must Islamize the West by force.

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