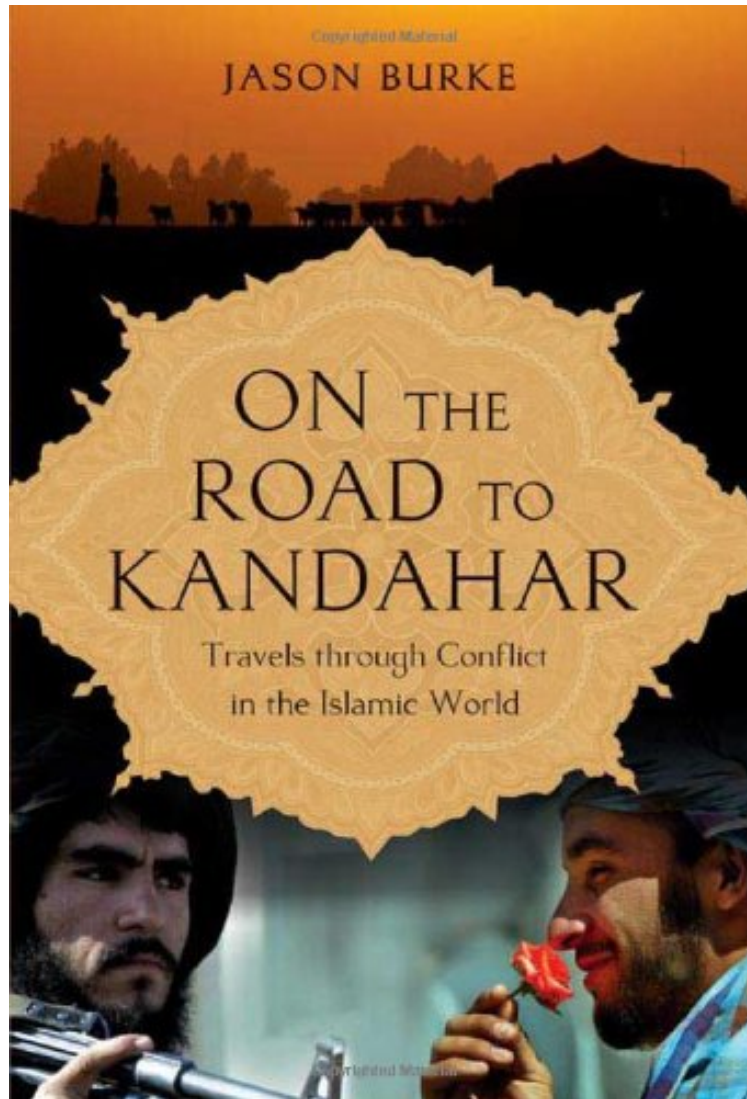


(Download ebook) On the Road to Kandahar: Travels Through Conflict in the Islamic World

# On the Road to Kandahar: Travels Through Conflict in the Islamic World

Jason Burke

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**Jason Burke : On the Road to Kandahar: Travels Through Conflict in the Islamic World** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On the Road to Kandahar: Travels Through Conflict in the Islamic World:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant. NuancedBy Rajiv ChopraThis is quite an excellent book, one that I would not ordinarily have picked up. However, what I like, is that Jason shows a rare sensitivity when

writing this book. He displays no antagonism to the people he meets on the road. His interpretations of what he sees, is subtle. He also takes the time to try and understand the people, and have real conversations with them. In doing so, he shows us a real glimpse of what is actually happening in the region. When he says, for instance, that Iraqis just want to put food on the table, we are suddenly reminded that we are all the same under the skin. We often look at people through the eyes of religion, not through the eyes of humanity. He brings this to the fore. A very good book, one well worth the read.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful analysis of Islamic militancy  
By J. I. Uitto  
Jason Burke is Chief Reporter for the Observer in London. He has written a superb book about conflict and violence in the Islamic world, an area he is thoroughly familiar with having worked and travelled in the region since 1991. Burke's analysis of the causes and consequences of violence and militancy is nuanced, thoughtful and based on years of interviews, field work and reflection. Yet he never writes as an apologist for the militant Islamists or terrorists. Unlike many journalists, Burke has made an effort to learn about Islam and has also studied Arabic and Urdu. The book is quite lively as Burke describes his travels, excursions into combat zones, and contacts and interviews with a wide range of actors that include Islamic clerics, jailed terrorists, Kurdish rebels, and various thinkers in the field. While the subtitle of the book refers to the "Islamic World" the bulk of the book is focused on Afghanistan, Iraq and, in particular, Kurdistan. Burke has specific sympathies towards the Kurds and their plight, although he does recognize how hard it has been for the Kurdish nation to find a common voice. The book does contain brief excursions to other parts of the Islamic world: Palestine-Israel, Algeria, Kashmir and southern Thailand. These are amongst the most interesting parts of the book and I wish Burke had spent more time and space discussing them. Burke's goal has been to understand militant Islam and to find explanations to the anger and the ensuing violent acts committed by a generation of Islamists. He makes some poignant observations, distinguishing between grievances based in particular situations in specific places (Kurdistan, Palestine-Israel, Egypt, Chechnya, Algeria) and the globalized Islamic extremism often practiced by alienated and frustrated young men from Europe or the middle classes in places like Saudi Arabia. He also draws sharp parallels between the left-wing terrorist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the right-wing extremism ranging from the original Nazis to the still-existing neo-Nazism. He arrives at a conclusion that "it is the grievance that comes first and is voiced within whatever discourse is available and makes sense at the time." At the end of the book, Jason Burke summarizes his experience thus: "For a long time I had tried to find some kind of general theory that would unlock the secret of 'Islamic militancy' and I suddenly realized it was impossible to do so. There was no single answer. Indeed the point was that there was no single answer." 'On the Road to Kandahar' is a thoughtful book that is worth reading for anyone who is concerned about the issues pertaining to the conflict with Islam, its causes, and how we should attempt to deal with it.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Part Travel Book, Part Intellectual Travels, 100% Well-Written  
By Brickbat70  
This is an excellent and informative book that's also a joy to read. Burke reports for Britain's "Observer" and he spent a decade covering stories in places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Algeria, and Turkey. He often found himself in the middle of complex acts of violence, and this book is part travel memoir and part intellectual memoir as he struggles to understand what it all means. I look for a few specific things in a good piece of travel writing. First, it needs to be well written, and Burke crafts strong, clear, concise, fast-flowing writing. He writes like a journalist, which means he trades flowery metaphors for sharp, direct statements. His descriptions of characters and places capture both the details and the mood, which ends up being vital to the points he wants to make. I also want a writer with insight. The author certainly needs to show insight into the cultures he encounters, but if self-exploration is also a goal, he or she also needs to show personal insight. Without insight I'd rather read a Lonely Planet guidebook. I liked Burke's approach. He is honest about his knowledge of other cultures, and he admits what he thinks while also staying aware of his lack of understanding. He describes violent acts and acknowledges that the deeper conflicts often prove to be too old and twisted for him to fully grasp. As for personal insight, Burke goes looking for that only in order to understand the conflicts he experiences. He might explore his own reactions under enemy fire, but it's only to better understand the nature of violence. This isn't a work of "spiritual travel" or a man's search for meaning, but it recognizes that any questions about the nature of violence require an understanding of your own nature. Finally, I have to like the author. Reading a travel book is like sharing a journey, and Burke seems like a cool guy--impressed with his travels without becoming arrogant, tough without going macho on the reader, and knowledgeable without needing to be an expert. He never once annoyed me, which is a bit of a rarity in travel writing (and in real travel). As for the ideas in "On the Road to Kandahar," I think it's fair to say that Burke ends up with more questions than answers. More accurately, he ends up with the same deep questions and only some preliminary answers, but he also learns how complex and troubling the original questions were. He wants to understand what motivates violence in the parts of the Islamic world he has visited, and what the end result of it all will be. The travel writing helps collect information for the first question. He talks to would-be suicide bombers, Kurdish resistance fighters, and Taliban sympathizers--many of them unlikable and unsavory characters--and tries to get at their motivations. He tries to piece it all together into a coherent understanding. He brings up the stress of change, and how the clash with modernity causes conflict in previously peaceful cultures. He discusses al-Qaeda's philosophies and how satellite television and the internet have allowed these philosophies to modify the grievances of local cultures. He explores how cultures react after they accept violence as an answer, and

after they see the results of that violence on other cultures and on their own culture. He realizes that 99% of the world simply wants to get by and live life--to raise children and enjoy friendships and have enough to eat and drink each day. And, finally, he sort-of comes to an optimistic conclusion--that cultures end up turning against violence. He sees much of the conflict in the Islamic world as a short-term answer (even if "short-term" means one hundred years), a trial attempt to solve problems with suicide bombers and violent revolution, and sees it all fading away once the cultures turn against it. I say "sort-of" because Burke is far from convinced, especially after experiencing the closeness of the London bombings. In the end, it's the best answer he has right now. And, in the end, it's this combination of intellectual honesty and optimism--and its telling in an exciting and engaging way--that helps make this such an outstanding book.

A daring reporter's quest through the "living history" of Islam amid the War on Terrorism.

From Publishers Weekly A veteran foreign correspondent, Burke takes his readers on a whistle-stop tour of modern Islamic radicalism in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine, Algeria, Thailand and places in between. Burke, whose previous book, *Al-Qaeda*, incisively cut through some of the errant conventional wisdom about that terrorist organization, began his Mideastern journeys as a volunteer in the Kurdish peshmerga after the first Gulf War. Many of his escapades read like scenes cut from *Full Metal Jacket* a fact he self-consciously acknowledges many times. Though Burke doesn't always have the strongest grasp on the intricacies of local politics and theologies and freely admits it, unlike many commentators his conversations with all kinds of ordinary people illuminate the struggles that define their existence and sometimes metastasize into intolerant ideologies. His conclusion is hopeful, if tinged with warning: "[D]espite the best efforts of men like bin Laden and al-Zawahiri and al-Zarqawi, despite the incompetent, corrupt, sclerotic dynastic rulers still clinging to power everywhere... the ordinary people of the Islamic world... whose voices were so often drowned out by shouting and gunfire... had not been won over by the radicals." Nonetheless, as Burke argues, the war in Iraq has clearly not helped matters. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist Through his own personal journey from a college student fighting alongside Kurdish guerrillas in northern Iraq in 1991 to a seasoned reporter covering conflicts from the Sahara to the Himalayas, British journalist Burke explores the complexities of the region and its culture, politics, and religion, which are often boiled down to anti-West terrorism and radicalism. Deriding the notion of Islamic culture as monolithic, Burke draws on interviews with government ministers, mujahideen, and refugees fleeing the violence to offer a portrait of the place of Islam in Middle Eastern politics and conflicts. Burke examines how Islam is used by some to radicalize and mobilize militants, and the propaganda fomented by the West and Islamic nations, including how the U.S. switched from denying Saddam Hussein's human-rights violations to suddenly discovering evidence and using it as justification for going to war against Iraq. As a journalist, he concedes his own culpability in the misunderstandings about the "Islamic world" as he details the evolving struggle to define and explain what is happening between the West and the Middle East. Vanessa Bush Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved.

"Jason Burke has been on the front lines of wars in the Muslim world for two decades, and it shows. *On the Road to Kandahar* is a thoughtful travelogue that takes the reader on an adventure that begins with Kurd-ish guerrillas fighting Saddam Hussein, to the Taliban religious warriors and their grim rule in Afghanistan, and to the bloody war in Iraq today. Along the way Burke has a lot of smart things to say about the various jihadist groups and Arab nationalists that have fuelled these conflicts. *On the Road to Kandahar* is really a pleasure to read." --Peter Bergen, CNN terrorism analyst and author of *Holy War, Inc.*, and the *Osama bin Laden I Know*

"Jason Burke's quest to understand radical Islam exposes dangerous myths that misguide the war on terrorism and ultimately reveals that learning more about why Muslims would be terrorists means taking an honest look at ourselves." --Charles Pea, senior fellow, Independent Institute, and author of *Winning the Un-War: A New Strategy for the War on Terrorism*

"A view from the sharp end. Intrepid and resourceful." --The Telegraph (UK)

"An astute guide to the range and complexity of the Islamic world." --Sunday Telegraph (UK)

"Beautifully written . . . intensely personal . . . absorbing and illuminating." --Daily Mail (UK)