

Thomas L. Friedman:

**"HOT, FLAT, AND CROWDED:
WHY WE NEED A GREEN REVOLUTION – AND HOW
IT CAN RENEW AMERICA"**

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Thomas L. Friedman's no. 1 bestseller *The World Is Flat* has helped millions of readers to see globalization in a new way. Now Friedman brings a fresh outlook to the crises of destabilizing climate change and rising competition for energy—both of which could poison our world if we do not act quickly and collectively. His argument speaks to all of us who are concerned about the state of America in the global future.

Friedman proposes that an ambitious national strategy—which he calls "Geo-Greenism"—is not only what we need to save the planet from overheating; it is what we need to make America healthier, richer, more innovative, more productive, and more secure.

When the U.S. Marines, General Electric (GE), and even China—an energy-poor, environmentally challenged industrial giant—are betting on green innovation to gain a competitive edge, you'd think U.S. policymakers would pay attention. Not yet, though, says Thomas L. Friedman in *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—And How It Can Renew America*. It is urgent, he says in this cri de coeur, that we unleash U.S. creativity—and capitalism—on the challenges of energy and climate change. "There is only one thing bigger than Mother Nature and that is Father Profit, and we have not even begun to enlist him in this struggle," he writes.

Expanding his horizons beyond globalization, the subject of *The World Is Flat* (2005), the three-time Pulitzer Prize winner argues that a trio of powerful dynamics is shaping our future. The "hot" of the title refers to global warming, or "global weirding," as he calls it, referring to the bizarre climate effects we are encountering. "Flat" refers to globalization, enhanced here with a look at how trade growth fuels energy use and hurts the environment. "Crowded" refers to humanity's relentless expansion

and its perilous effects on biodiversity and the planet's finite resources. The only solution to these ills, he forcefully asserts: innovation in the form of a green revolution.

As in *The World Is Flat*, he explains a new era—the Energy-Climate era—through an illuminating account of recent events. He shows how 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the flattening of the world by the Internet (which brought 3 billion new consumers onto the world stage) have combined to bring climate and energy issues to Main Street. But they have not gone very far down Main Street; the much-touted "green revolution" has hardly begun. With all that in mind, Friedman sets out the clean-technology breakthroughs we, and the world, will need; he shows that the ET (Energy Technology) revolution will be both transformative and disruptive; and he explains why America must lead this revolution—with the first Green President and a Green New Deal, spurred by the Greenest Generation.

Setting out to explain 'why the world needs a green revolution — and how we can renew our global future', it soon becomes startlingly apparent that the 'we' specifically means the American people, and the 'our' is Fortress America and, basically, to hell with the rest of the world, particular the Muslim world, unless 'we' are fully prepared to support 'them'.

In the stinging terms of aggressive American pomposity he is renowned for, Friedman hammers away on the already familiar themes of 'the unique energy, climate and biodiversity challenges the world faces' before laying the blame almost, though not, admittedly entirely, on the rapidly increasing Chinese and Indian middle classes who should not, if he had his way, be allowed access to the modern trappings of life which are taken for granted in European and American homes. Nor should they own cars or jump on and off aeroplanes as he himself adores to do.

Islamic beliefs, radical Islam and Islamic extremism, subjects not normally discussed in works on supposedly forward-looking environmental issues, all come under critical scrutiny with the 'Petro-dictators' of Saudi Arabia catching the most flak. 'In my view, the mass murder on September 11, 2001, of nearly 3,000 people — perpetrated by 19 men, 15 of whom were Saudis — was one of those big events that illuminate a whole set of underlying trends that have been building for a long time. What it illuminated was that our oil addiction is not just changing the climate system; it is also changing the international system in four fundamental ways. First, and most important, through our energy purchases we are helping to strengthen the most intolerant, antimodern, anti-Western, anti-women's rights, and antipluralistic strain of Islam — the strain propagated by Saudi Arabia.'

Naturally 'the Sunni suicide bomb squads of Iraq, Palestine and Pakistan' all get a mention as does 'American mountain climber-turned-educator' Greg Mortenson who has built over 70 'progressive schools across rural Pakistan and

Afghanistan, to fight Islamic extremism by trying to alleviate poverty and improve access to education' and who is quoted as saying: 'Every time I visited to check on one of our projects, it seemed 10 Wahhabi madrassas had popped up nearly overnight. They're churning out generation after generation of brainwashed students and thinking 20, 40, even 60 years ahead to a time when their armies of extremism will have the numbers to swarm over Pakistan and the rest of the Islamic world.'

Friedman himself visited Peshawar a month after the US-led coalition invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and there he saw signs saying 'Call this phone number if you want to join in the jihad against America'. It was a city in which he felt most unwelcome, he recalls: 'Or maybe it was the cold stares and steely eyes that greeted the obvious foreigner. Those eyes did not say, "American Express accepted here". They said, "Get lost".' This is hardly surprising considering the circumstances.

Visiting the Darul Uloom Haqqania, 'the biggest madrasah, or Islamic school, in Pakistan, with 2,800 live-in students', Friedman was most unsettled when he asked a 12-year-old boy 'what his reaction was to the September 11 attacks'.

He was told: 'Most likely the attack came from Americans inside America. I am pleased that America has had to face pain, because the rest of the world has tasted its pain'. The boy's general view of Americans was another kick in the teeth for Friedman: 'They are unbelievers and do not like to befriend Muslims, and they want to dominate the world with their power'.

Little of the above relates to what is actually promised in blurbs about Hot, Flat and Crowded and the reader is left wondering what on earth prompted Friedman's voluminous outpouring of often racist, Islamophobic discourse and, more to the point, what ulterior motive could be lurking behind it?

In Friedman's own words: 'We need America, and the world needs America, to be something more than just the "United States of Fighting Terrorism". Yes, we must never forget who our enemies are, but we must always remember who we are, "they" are the people who perpetrate 9/11s. "We" are the people who celebrate the Fourth of July.'

But stay with him, though. Surprising material is scattered throughout, and the final sections may be the book's most relevant. Its very sprawl emphasizes the scale of these problems and allows the author to make a strong case for the possibility and necessity of addressing them. With a tone of urgent hopefulness—or "sober optimism," as he says—he beseeches voters, executives, and politicians to get on with it.

Success Stories

Friedman hops across the globe to document the intimate interplay of the three trends. In the jungles of Sumatra, he visits a conservation activist who worked with an energy developer and with villagers to create an economy that fosters rather than destroys the rainforest. Then Friedman is on to Iraq, where a U.S. general on the front lines installs solar panels to reduce the need to transport diesel to fuel electric generators. Cut to Connecticut, where CEO Jeffrey R. Immelt (a recurring character) talks up how tougher environmental standards have made GE's high-efficiency locomotives best-sellers and a leading export to China.

Innovation, whether the result of policy or entrepreneurialism, is the key to these success stories. Unfortunately, America remains caught up in what Friedman calls a "dumb as we wanna be" mindset, where "drill, baby, drill" is an easier sell than long-term, comprehensive energy policy.

This has security implications. There's a simple, negative correlation, says the author, between oil and democracy: As oil prices rise, petrodictators grow rich and democracies weaken. Conversely, as oil prices fall, petro-dictators grow weaker and democracies flourish. Think of the reforms of Russia and Iran in the 1990s, when oil prices were low, compared with the countries' troublemaking in the era of \$100-per-barrel oil.

What's more, he notes, petro-states tend to undereducate their youth, fueling unemployment and creating a breeding ground for terrorism. How to reverse this pattern? Radically cut energy demand and invent fantastic substitutes.

Which brings us to China's green ambitions—and the U.S.'s failure.

If you read only part of this book, let it be the final chapters, in which Friedman explores how China could emerge as a green prodigy. Sure, Chinese leaders unleashed two decades of environmental turmoil by replacing communism with "GDP-ism." But increasingly, Friedman says, those leaders are recognizing that environmental harm threatens not only the land, water, and air but also their political future.

So they're acting. China's voluntary goal of decreasing carbon emissions, for example, would result in five times more greenhouse-gas savings than the targets set by Europe under the Kyoto Protocol. China also has higher national targets for renewable energy than the U.S. (where there are none) and tougher mileage rules for its burgeoning fleet of vehicles.

If China's leaders see the necessity of this approach, Friedman wonders, why can't ours? Despite the scale of the challenge, he is optimistic that the political, technical, and economic means are at hand to spark a U.S. economic revolution. From windmills to advanced batteries, the results could mean new exports and jobs.

Yet, Friedman is certain the public can tackle the challenge. He criticizes articles that offer "205 easy ways to save the earth." Such pandering implies that the revolution will be painless. It will not be: It will demand ugly political battles, the fall of dirty industries, and the rise of new, clean ones. "I am convinced," he writes, "that the public is ready; they're ahead of the politicians." For now, though, the petrodictators are surely the only ones smiling.

Adeel Jamaluddin Khan¹

¹ Currently teaching at International Islamic university of Pakistan and did his M.Phil/MA Politics & International Relations in 2000 from Department of Politics & International Studies, Christ Church College, Oxford. UK.