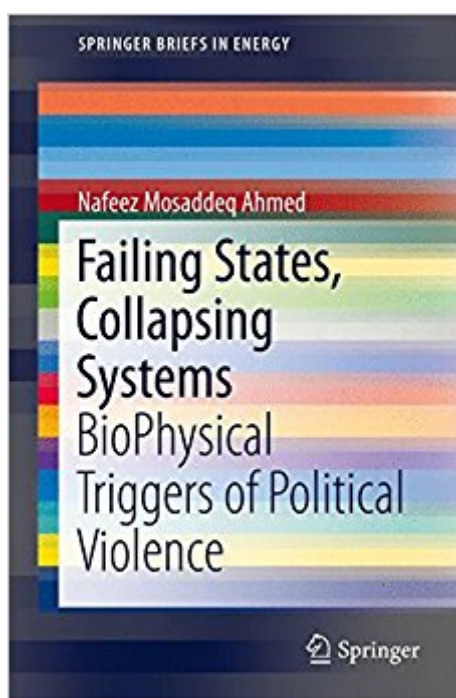


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# Failing States, Collapsing Systems: BioPhysical Triggers Of Political Violence (SpringerBriefs In Energy)



## Synopsis

This work executes a unique transdisciplinary methodology building on the author's previous book, *A User's Guide to the Crisis of Civilization: And How to Save it* (Pluto, 2010), which was the first peer-reviewed study to establish a social science framework for the integrated analysis of crises across climate, energy, food, economic, terror and the police state. Since the 2008 financial crash, the world has witnessed an unprecedented outbreak of social unrest in every major continent. Beginning with the birth of the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, the eruption of civil disorder continues to wreak havoc unpredictably from Greece to Ukraine, from China to Thailand, from Brazil to Turkey, and beyond. Yet while policymakers and media observers have raced to keep up with events, they have largely missed the biophysical triggers of this new age of unrest – the end of the age of cheap fossil fuels, and its multiplying consequences for the Earth's climate, industrial food production, and economic growth. This book for the first time develops an empirically-ground theoretical model of the complex interaction between biophysical processes and geopolitical crises, demonstrated through the analysis of a wide range of detailed case studies of historic, concurrent and probable state failures in the Middle East, Northwest Africa, South and Southeast Asia, Europe and North America. Geopolitical crises across these regions, Ahmed argues, are being driven by the proliferation of climate, food and economic crises which have at their root the common denominator of a fundamental and permanent disruption in the energy basis of industrial civilization. This inevitable energy transition, which will be completed well before the close of this century, entails a paradigm shift in the organization of civilization. Yet for this shift to result in a viable new way of life will require a fundamental epistemological shift recognizing humanity's embeddedness in the natural world. For this to be achieved, the stranglehold of conventional models achieved through the hegemony of establishment media reporting – dominated by fossil fuel interests – must be broken. While geopolitics cannot be simplistically reduced to the biophysical, this book shows that international relations today can only be understood by recognizing the extent to which the political is embedded in the biophysical. Although the book offers a rigorous scientific analysis, it is written in a clean, journalistic style to ensure readability and accessibility to a general audience. It will contain a large number of graphical illustrations concerning oil production data, population issues, the food price index, economic growth and debt, and other related issues to demonstrate the interconnections and correlations across key sectors.

## Book Information

Series: SpringerBriefs in Energy

Paperback: 110 pages

Publisher: Springer; 1st ed. 2017 edition (November 30, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 3319478141

ISBN-13: 978-3319478142

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.3 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #278,365 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Energy Policy #113 in Books > Business & Money > Industries > Energy & Mining > Oil & Energy #239 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Sustainable Development

## Customer Reviews

If you're new to the notions of peak oil / EROEI / collapse of industrial civilization, and/or would like to try and enlighten a friend that might be receptive to these issues, I'd say that you can't go wrong by picking up a copy of *Failing States, Collapsing Systems*. (From *Filmerstofarmers* com, February, 2017) *Failing States, Collapsing Systems: BioPhysical Triggers of Political Violence*, a thought-provoking new book by Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed. The book is only 94 pages (plus an extensive and valuable bibliography), but the author packs in a coherent theoretical framework as well as lucid case studies of ten countries and regions. (Resilience, [resilience.org](http://resilience.org), January, 2017)

Dr Nafeez Ahmed is an award-winning investigative journalist, bestselling author and noted international security scholar. He is listed in the Evening Standard's 2014 and 2015 'Progress 1000' selection of the most globally influential Londoners. Ahmed is a columnist for *VICE* science and technology magazine, *Motherboard*, and for the London-based digital news platform *Middle East Eye*. He is a former environment blogger at *The Guardian* where he reported on the geopolitics of interconnected environmental, energy and economic crises via his *Earth Insight* blog. He has also written and reported for *The Independent*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Scotsman*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Atlantic*, *Quartz*, *Prospect*, *New Statesman*, *Le Monde diplomatique*, *Raw Story*, *Asia Times*, among many others. Ahmed has twice won the Project Censored Award for

his journalism, in 2014 for his story on the energy geopolitics behind the Ukraine crisis, and in 2013 for his article on food riots as a "new normal."

Ahmed's book, *A User's Guide to the Crisis of Civilization: And How to Save It* (Pluto, 2010), was the first integrated peer-reviewed study of the intersection of climate change, energy depletion, food scarcity, economic instability, terrorism and state-militarisation. In 2010, he won the Routledge-GCP&S Essay Prize for his seminal paper presenting the social science framework for the book in the journal *Global Change, Peace and Security*, "The International Relations of Crisis and the Crisis of International Relations."

Ahmed's previous books include *The London Bombings: An Independent Inquiry* (Duckworth, 2006); *The War on Truth: 9/11, Disinformation and the Anatomy of Terrorism* (Interlink, 2005); *Behind the War on Terror: Western Secret Strategy and the Struggle for Iraq* (New Society, 2003) and *The War on Freedom: How & Why America was Attacked, September 11, 2001* (Progressive, 2002). The latter is archived in the "9/11 Commission Materials" Special Collection at the US National Archives in Washington DC – it was among 99 books made available to each 9/11 Commissioner of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States to use during their investigations. He also contributed to the Coroner's Inquest into the 7/7 London bombings, and has advised the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, British Foreign Office and US State Department, among other government agencies.

Nafeez's academic work revolves around the historical sociology and political ecology of mass violence in the context of civilizational systems, and focuses on bridging disciplinary divides across the natural and social sciences. He has taught international politics, contemporary history, empire and globalisation at the University of Sussex's School of Global Studies and Brunel University's Politics & History Unit. He is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Global Sustainability Institute of Anglia Ruskin University's Faculty of Science and Technology.

I found this author's work to be insightful and well constructed. He clearly explained his theory that there are interconnections and a positive feedback loop between failing Earth Systems (ESD - Earth Systems Disruption) and human society destabilization (HSD- Human Systems Destabilization). His analysis of the Western Industrial Society model's military response to increasing "third world" resource scarcity and the corresponding rise in intrastate violence in the Middle East/North Africa (MEDA) areas is convincing. I dropped one star from an otherwise stellar work because I was taken aback by one thing that struck me as obvious, yet was only singularly addressed and a subtle, yet pervasive taint of Leftist PC speak... the obligatory "anything West is bad" language that is required by modern academia. The obvious point that was only addressed with a single sentence

was the relationship between the ever increasing size of our Earth's population and the demand for an ever increasing quantity of raw materials to feed/house/clothe and power that population. The author quoted rising populations in MENA and India thoroughly, yet in his recommended solutions to this resource issue, only mentioned reducing overall population in a single sentence on page 95. The observation that "less people use less stuff" seems to have eluded him. The Leftist slant was revealed in several ways. The removal of government subsidies for food and fuel was cited repeatedly as a primary cause of social disruption- I got the innuendo from the language and repetition that these subsidies are rights, vice a privilege enabled by surplus. Capitalism was repeatedly associated with inequity- as if, once again, equity of distribution regardless of inequity of participation, husbandry or labor was also a right. While citations of failed, corrupt systems claiming to be democratic or capitalist were numerous, I found little reference to failed collectivist systems. The author also seemed to equate American Patriot organizations to Islamic Supremacists, seeming to cite an equivalence in the frequency and root causes of violence initiated by each respective group. My opinion, for whatever it is worth, based upon my own experiences and research with both groups, has led me to conclude that most American Patriot groups are motivated by a desire to preserve the tradition of Individual Liberty- freedom from government interference while they simply live their lives- while Islamic Supremacism is based upon the idea that all Fitna (disorder) is to be suppressed by forcing others to conform to Sharia/Sira or the holder's definition thereof. The author seems to adhere to current PC doctrine, dismissing the previous 1400 years of Islamic violence in support of Islamic Supremacy, only being aware of recent Islamic violence and placing the causation of same exclusively on US foreign policy within the last 50 years. While the last 50 years of militaristic actions by the West are undoubtedly acting as a fertilizer, the root cause of Islamic violence has always been the belief of Islamic Supremacy. Any unbiased person can clearly see there is no equivalency in the frequencies of violence by the two groups- there is no "daily attack briefing" ref Pro-Patriot groups such as there is with Islamic Supremists. So claiming anything near an equivalence in frequency of violence is simply an Apologia, consistent with the genuflection towards Islam required by current universities. Finally, in the author's recommendations, sustainable organic gardening, self-employment and localized democracy are seen as solutions, which certainly makes sense. However, the American Patriot Movement lauds all of these conditions as virtues- the entire philosophy is based upon self-reliance and the voice of the individual. It betrays the Leftist Collegiate mindset to first critique a movement as "Right Wing/ Violent", then recommend as a solution set the very foundations of that same movement. And of course, the Collectivism implied in the recommendation to "redistribute" itself violates the

individual's self-determination, self-employment and stewardship of his own land and life. Again with the PC talk. Overall- a worthwhile read. This was an intelligent analysis by a keen mind. Like all of us, the author has some blind spots imprinted by his environment, but that in no way detracts from his incisive observations on the interconnectedness and feedback loops of ESD and HSD as a complex system.

This is the most insightful, informative, meaningful, frightening book I have ever read.

This book was published by top scientific and engineering publisher Springer, and is part of the group that also owns Nature magazine, the most prestigious journal in the world (tied with Science magazine). Ahmed's book is about the biophysical factors that bring nations down, such as drought and water scarcity exacerbated by climate change and high population growth at a time when less and less food can be grown. The hardest hit nations are past their peak production of oil, so there is less and less revenue to buy or subsidize food and water, which leads to social unrest, which worsens all the other factors. On average, this causes nations 15 years past peak oil production to experience systemic state failure. Ahmed points out that "because these and other factors are so nested and interconnected, even small perturbations and random occurrences in one can amplify effects on other parts of the system, sometimes in a feedback process that continues. If thresholds are reached, these tipping points can re-order the whole system". These ecological and geological factors result in social disorder, which makes it even harder for government to do anything, such as putting more money into water and food production infrastructure, which accelerates climate change and energy decline impacts, which leads to even more violence at an accelerating rate until state failure. The media and experts blame it on poor government, usually ignoring the real reasons because all they know is politics and economics. Perhaps this is because journalists have bought into the free-market ideology of economists, who ignore the role of energy and natural resources as the basis of our fossil-fueled civilization and see the world only through money and credit, because they can't imagine limits to growth on a finite planet, since The Market and Human Ingenuity will always come up with Something Else, regardless of the laws of physics and thermodynamics (perhaps they're so used to breaking financial laws that they don't see why the Laws of Nature can't be overcome either). Energy and natural resources are completely ignored in their fancy and fanciful equations. For example, if you cut a forest down and sell the lumber for \$500 million, you've added \$500 million to the GDP. But when water treatment plants downstream have to spend \$500 million more to treat the water, \$500

million is ADDED to GDP, not subtracted. Nor is the cost of soil erosion on farmland that floods after the forest is cut down, sending poisonous pesticides downstream and eutrophication killing off fisheries in the Gulf, or the shortening of the productive lifespan of the topsoil on the farms from 1500 years to 300 years and the consequent cost of the lost food production for a millennia, since soil takes 500 to 1000 years to regenerate. As it is, Saudi Arabia is expected to stop exporting oil by 2030 due to both declining oil production and increasing population (Saudi Arabia's population has grown 8-fold since 1960), and BAM! -- down goes India and China, who are well past their own peak oil production. By 2045, every nation on earth will be on the way to collapse as supply chains break and the electric grid fails (see *When Trucks Stop Running: Energy and the Future of Transportation* (SpringerBriefs in Energy)). Read the book to find out when collapse is coming to your nation (or see my review at energyskeptic). In my opinion, failing Middle East states may destabilize the few exporting countries like Saudi Arabia before 2030. And that will hasten the end of the oil age, since the ME has 2/3 of the remaining oil reserves, leaving plenty of oil in the ground if social unrest, war, and/or terrorism lower oil production, or even destroy the oil infrastructure. After the ensuing dark age, it may be hard to get back to the same level of technology as before to get the remaining oil out. Ignore and hate these truths if you like, but unlike fake news, Ahmed has hundreds of citations to back up the points he makes.

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