

Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism

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Reading this book is a lot like trying to eat undercooked meat – there is protein in there, but it is flavorless and tedious. You can chew and chew, but you just cannot bring yourself to swallow it. The author presents his case with an authoritative tone, stuffing each paragraph with names, dates, and historical data, but a closer look reveals the use of manipulative language that strings together half-truths and repeated insinuations with conclusions that do not directly relate to the given evidence. The “Acknowledgements” mention that the author has important friends in media and politics, yet his credentials (e.g., for whom he is working, or what his political motivations are) are not given. This is a serious weakness.

Even more serious is his clear contempt for Islam, for he makes no genuine distinction between Muslims’ desire for self-rule based upon their belief system (often called “Islamism”) and terrorism. The CIA’s use of Muslim lives to advance American corporate interests is taken for granted, while Muslims are portrayed as untrustworthy imbeciles or ungrateful servants. Such mainstream and moderate organizations and intellectuals as Tablighi Jamaat, Jamaat Islami, Maududi of Pakistan, and Hassan al-Turabi of Sudan are given as examples of dangerous extremism. American terrorism against Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan, and its support of Israel, are unquestioned as being justified, noble, and necessary, while any attack on western interests or American lives is described with emotionally loaded terms. The only serious criticism of the United States is that it ever trusted Muslims as allies.

The introduction asserts that the West must not make Islam into a Satanic foe, which the rest of the book immediately contradicts by referring to Islam's resurgence in Muslim countries as a contagious disease that must be quarantined and nipped in the bud before it contaminates the entire world; Islamic political parties should be outlawed before they can be voted into power by popular demand; and Islam must be limited to a cultural ritual while political control of Muslim national resources must remain in the hands of westerners. Apparently, in the author's analysis, a "moderate Muslim" is one who puts American and Israeli concerns above the needs of his or her own people.

Chapter 1, "Carter and Brezhnev in the Valley of Decision," discusses the Soviet-American conflicts of interest leading to covert American aid to Islamists starting in 1979, and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Chapter 2, "Anwar al-Sadat," discusses Egypt's precarious role as a supporter of the United States and Israel while recruiting volunteers for jihad in Afghanistan with the help of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who was later imprisoned for life in a New York Federal prison. In Chapter 3, "Zia al-Haq," the author details Pakistan's enthusiastic cooperation with the United States and the mistrustful alliance forged between the United States and the various Islamic factions of Afghani fighters. Allegedly, the war planners gave no thought to the boom in international drug trafficking that would soon be the result of destabilizing the region. Chapter 4, "Deng Xiaoping," goes into the CIA's use of China's Muslim territories to build bases for monitoring Soviet missile tests and communications, and the Chinese arming and training of volunteers to fight in Afghanistan, who would later come back to demand independence from China.

Chapter 5, "Recruiters, Trainers, Trainees and Assorted Spooks," reveals the complex relationships between western intelligence agencies, their Third World puppet dictators, and the use of various Islamic missionary organizations for their cooperative spying projects against the USSR. Chapter 6, "Donors, Bankers and Profiteers," contains serious allegations of the CIA's criminal financing of the Afghan jihad and international terrorism in cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and later, by private individuals such as Usama bin Laden. The charges range from international drug and arms smuggling to simple bank robberies.

Chapter 7, "Poppy Fields, Killing Fields, and Druglords," explains the paradoxical situation of the United States undermining its own "War on Drugs." "While the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other agencies were spending billions of dollars to stem the tidal wave of narcotics from South Asia, the CIA and its allies were turning a blind eye or actively

encouraging it.” Indeed, the book describes a shoot-out between the two agencies over the raid of a drug laboratory. The author details how to process opium into heroin, the smuggling routes through Central Asia, and tells how the United States later prosecuted and imprisoned the drug dealers that had worked with the CIA to help American interests in the region. Although the book so often portrays Muslims as two-timing traitors who turned against their American benefactors, it certainly appears to the critical observer that it was the United States who turned against those who willingly spent their lives supporting the American crusade against communism.

In Chapter 8, “Russia: Bitter Aftertaste and Reluctant Return,” Russia struggles to stem the Islamist tide from nearby Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, fearing the Muslim independence struggles will destabilize Central Asia. Chapter 9, “The Contagion Spreads: Egypt and the Maghreb,” studies the successes and failures of the Egyptian and North African governments of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia in stamping out Islamic political movements. Interestingly, the author concludes that such monarchies as those in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, which are believed by the common people to have religious legitimacy because they claim hereditary descent from the Prophet, have an easier time than secular regimes of fighting Islamism.

Chapter 10, “The Contagion Spreads: The Assault on America,” gives a one-sided presentation of the charges against Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, Ramzi Yousef, and others convicted of terrorism or conspiracy against the United States. Additionally, the author misrepresents the roots of political strife in Kashmir, Indonesia, and Israel/Palestine by failing to mention the grievances of Muslims, whose rights under international law are continually violated. The author implies that the Taliban’s request for evidence against bin Laden before handing him over to the United States for prosecution was an illegitimate concern.

Chapter 11, “More Contagion: The Philippines,” details Islamic terrorism led by Abu Sayyaf, an Afghan war veteran. The violence is explained as the result of domestic grievances caused by Christian missionary pressures over the Muslim minority population agitated by CIA-trained returnees from Afghanistan. The Christian role in the sectarian violence is downplayed while Muslims are blamed.

The Epilogue reflects on the past and future of Islamic terrorism, and concludes with a strange question of “whether Islamists win or lose in turbulent, changing societies like that of Iran.” This shows the author’s complete misunderstanding of what Muslims face in trying to interpret and implement Islam in modern times. At no time does the author ever imagine

the possibility of a popular, democratic establishment of Islamic principles in government. It is simply a matter of whether Islamists will succeed or fail in imposing a tyranny of terror upon the world.

The book includes two maps: Afghanistan and its neighbors, and one outlining the movements of CIA-trained guerillas and drugs from Afghanistan throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, and the United States. It concludes with a footnotes section, an FBI press release announcing the indictment of bin Laden and Muhammad Atef in the 1998 American Embassy bombings in Africa, and two declassified "Top Secret" documents written by former Soviet President Brezhnev, and other former Soviet diplomats justifying their 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, and lastly, a 19-page index.

Unholy Wars presents a deeply prejudiced analysis that reveals total confusion about the thinking and motivation of Islamic movements. Although this book was written before the 9/11 tragedy, it demonstrates the set pattern for the future American intelligence failure. Through repeated although unsubstantiated accusations, the book gives far more importance to certain Islamic celebrity scapegoats such as bin Laden than they probably deserve, often relying on faulty intelligence information planted in pro-Israeli American newspapers as evidence. If this is what the experts on terrorism actually believe, it appears that the United States is doomed to lose its "War on Islam." Perhaps it soon will find itself broken like the USSR, but without any friends left to bail it out. The fatal flaw will likely be their devaluing of the moral legitimacy of Islamic struggles for religious and political freedom, and the refusal to see past the corruption and incompetence of Muslim governments and to admit the humanity of common Muslims.

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