



The Al Qaeda Reader

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The global war on terror is not just a military conflict but a war of ideas. Indeed it is in some respects primarily an ideological struggle. Yet it is a war we cannot win without a broader understanding of al-Qaeda's goals and motives.

What do our enemies believe? What motivates their war against the West? What is their vision of the ideal Islamic society? Surprisingly, more than five years after 9/11, there is very little understanding of these questions.

Despite our tendency to dismiss Islamic extremism as profoundly irrational, al-Qaeda is not without a coherent body of beliefs. Like other totalitarian movements, the movement's leaders have rationalized their brutality in a number of published treatises. Now, for the first time, *The Al Qaeda Reader* gathers together the essential texts and documents that trace the origin, history, and evolution of the ideas of al-Qaeda founders Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden.

This extraordinary collection of the key texts of the al-Qaeda movement—including incendiary materials never before translated into English—lays bare the minds, motives, messages, and ultimate goals of an enemy bent on total victory. Al-Qaeda's chilling ideology calls for a relentless *jihad* against non-Muslim "infidels," repudiates democracy in favor of Islamic law, stresses the importance of martyrdom, and mocks the notion of "moderate" Islam.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of these works is how grounded they are in the traditional sources of Islamic theology: the Koran and the teachings of the Prophet. The founders of al-Qaeda use these sources as powerful weapons of persuasion, reminding followers (and would-be recruits) that Muhammad and his warriors spread Islam through the power of the sword and that the Koran is not merely allegory or history but literal truth that commands all Muslims to action.

In addition to laying bare al-Qaeda's ultimate motives, *The Al Qaeda Reader* includes the organization's propagandist speeches, which are directed primarily at Americans, Europeans, and Iraqis. Here, al-Qaeda's many "official" accusations against the West are meticulously delineated, from standard complaints such as the Palestinian issue and Iraq to wholly unexpected ones concerning the U.S.'s exploitation of women and the environment.

Taken together, the Theology and Propaganda sections of this volume reveal the most comprehensive picture of al-Qaeda to date. They also highlight the double-speak of bin Laden and Zawahiri, who often say one thing to Muslims in their religious treatises ("We must hate and fight the West because Islam commands it") and another in their propaganda directed at the West ("The West is the aggressor and we are fighting back merely in self-defense").

Westerners from across the political spectrum will be fascinated and enlightened by *The Al Qaeda Reader's* insights into the nature of Islamic texts and the ways in which al-Qaeda has used these texts to manufacture hatred against our civilization and our way of life.

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