



Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century

By Marc Sageman

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In the post-September 11 world, Al Qaeda is no longer the central organizing force that aids or authorizes terrorist attacks or recruits terrorists. It is now more a source of inspiration for terrorist acts carried out by independent local groups that have branded themselves with the Al Qaeda name. Building on his previous groundbreaking work on the Al Qaeda network, forensic psychiatrist Marc Sageman has greatly expanded his research to explain how Islamic terrorism emerges and operates in the twenty-first century.

In *Leaderless Jihad*, Sageman rejects the views that place responsibility for terrorism on society or a flawed, predisposed individual. Instead, he argues, the individual, outside influence, and group dynamics come together in a four-step process through which Muslim youth become radicalized. First, traumatic events either experienced personally or learned about indirectly spark moral outrage. Individuals interpret this outrage through a specific ideology, more felt and understood than based on doctrine. Usually in a chat room or other Internet-based venues, adherents share this moral outrage, which resonates with the personal experiences of others. The outrage is acted on by a group, either online or offline.

Leaderless Jihad offers a ray of hope. Drawing on historical analogies, Sageman argues that the zeal of jihadism is self-terminating; eventually its followers will turn away from violence as a means of expressing their discontent. The book concludes with Sageman's recommendations for the application of his research to counterterrorism law enforcement efforts.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Marc Sageman is an extraordinarily thoughtful and creative analyst of the complex patterns of Islamic radicalization taking place within our integrated global culture. His work challenges the way we think about terrorism and offers important insights about what should be done to prevent or contain such violence."—Steve Coll, author of *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*

"*Leaderless Jihad* discredits conventional wisdom about terrorists by eschewing anecdotes and conjecture in favor of hard data and statistics."—Aryn Baker, *Time*

"This book belongs at the top of the list for anyone seeking to understand the nature of radical Islamic terrorism, its future, and the effective ways that Western countries can counter its destructive appeal."—Lawrence Wright, author of *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*

"*Leaderless Jihad* provides new analysis and important insights. . . . Sageman's data-driven approach is all too rare in a field dominated by informed (when we're fortunate) opinion."—*The American Interest*

"What distinguishes his new book, *Leadless Jihad* is that it peels away the emotional, reflexive responses to terrorism that have grown up since Sept. 11, 2001, and looks instead at scientific data Sageman has collected on more than 500 Islamic terrorists—to understand who they are, why they attack, and how to stop them."—David Ignatius, *Washington Post*

"It might be comforting to think that angry young Islamists are crazed psychopaths or sex-starved adolescents who have been brainwashed in malign madrassas. But Mr Sageman, a senior fellow at the Philadelphia-based Foreign Policy Research Institute, explodes each of these myths, and others besides, in an unsettling account of how Al Qaeda has evolved from the organisation headed by Osama bin Laden into an amorphous movement—a 'leaderless jihad.'"—*The Economist*

"Sage­man's incisive observations based on carefully examined evidence, astute insights, and scholarship make *Leaderless Jihad* the gold standard in Al Qaeda studies."—*Washington Times*

"Politicians who talk about the terrorism threat . . . should be required to read this new book. . . . It stands what you think you know about terrorism on its head and helps you see the topic in a different light."—*Washington Post*

"[an] important, face-the-facts book . . . Sage­man is deservedly one of the best-known academics working on terrorism."—*Spectator*

About the Author

Marc Sage­man, a forensic psychiatrist, is a government counterterrorism consultant. He is the author of the bestselling *Understanding Terror Networks*, also available from the University of Pennsylvania Press.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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