



Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda

Omar Nasiri , Gordon Corera (Introduction)

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Between 1994 and 2000, Omar Nasiri worked as a secret agent for Europe's top foreign intelligence services - including France's DGSE (*Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure*), and Britain's MI5 and MI6. From the netherworld of Islamist cells in Belgium, to the training camps of Afghanistan, to the radical mosques of London, he risked his life to defeat the emerging global network that the West would come to know as Al Qaeda. Now, for the first time, Nasiri shares the story of his life-a life balanced precariously between the world of Islamic *jihadists* and the spies who pursue them. As an Arab and a Muslim, he was able to infiltrate the rigidly controlled Afghan training camps, where he encountered men who would later be known as the most-wanted terrorists on earth: Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi, Abu Zubayda, and Abu Khabab al-Masri. Sent back to Europe with instructions to form a sleeper cell, Nasiri became a conduit for messages going back and forth between Al Qaeda's top recruiter in Pakistan and London's radical cleric Abu Qatada. A gripping and provocative insider's account of both Islamist terror networks and the intelligence services that spy on them, *Inside the Jihad* offers a completely original perspective on the ongoing battle against Al Qaeda.

Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda Details

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From Reader Review Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda for online ebook

Melinda says

After getting caught up in the GIA in Belgium, Omar Nasiri decides to work with the French intelligence agency as a spy. He trains with the mujahidin in Afghanistan (fulfilling a long-time dream of his, as well as a promise to the DGSE), then moves to London to surveil the rise of radicals like Abu Qatada, Abu Hamza and Omar Bakri Muhammad. It's a fascinating story, reading at times like a novel, but it's clear that Nasiri — unlike ex-Islamist memoirists Ed Husain and Maajid Nawaz — remains committed to the goals of Islamism, including violence, though within limits that the GIA, al-Qaida, and other jihadist groups transgress.

The book comes with a bizarre introduction by a former CIA official. Michael Scheuer offers up Nasiri's memoir as evidence of his theory that jihadists are motivated by neither religion nor hatred of the West but foreign policy grievances alone. Scheuer also claims that recruiting is practically non-existent, in favor of self-recruiting. This narrative doesn't match Nasiri's; his brother's religious turn to Salafism coincided with his involvement in the GIA and recruitment of Nasiri as a weapons runner. Nasiri writes laudatorily of the religious lessons in the training camps and praises Abu Qatada as a "true scholar" of Islam (in contrast to the demagoguery of Abu Hamza). While it's true that Nasiri enjoys life in Europe — along with wine, cigarettes and womanizing — he makes it clear that his fellow fighters eschew everything "*taghut*," including Nasiri's secret lifestyle, and resent the "cultural imperialism" of the United States.

Throughout the text the author transcribes Qur'an as "Kur'an" — a peculiar stylistic choice that is neither English (Koran) nor Arabic (Qur'an). It's particularly jarring given the ample use of other Arabic words and names that start with "q": qibla, Qatada, Qaeda.

Ed says

If goodreads had a rating below one star "Inside the Jihad" would qualify.

There are a lot of laudatory reviews of this book and many if not most reviewers take the author's claims at face value. I think he has less credibility than James Frey or Clifford Irving.

There is no translator or co-author credited but the book is written in clear idiomatic English—which would be Nasiri's fourth language, after Maghrebi Arabic, French and German—possibly a record, certainly better than Joseph Conrad or Ha Jin could do. He writes of lying to, cheating and stealing from his family, friends and co-conspirators, says he was able to fool a drug dealer in Belgium—and even convince the drug dealer to lead him to an arms dealer and dupe the arms dealers into providing guns and ammunition to him with no money up front and no security for the illegal goods. He was a triple agent, playing the spy services of several European countries against each other and also fooling Al Qaeda operatives into recruiting him while he worked for (or at least was being paid by) two intelligence services that were operating against Al Qaeda.

So this guy claims to be a very accomplished liar who has spent his life taking advantage of the gullible-- apparently everyone he encounters—with no compunction about spinning whatever tales will help him and who is almost always successful. If that is the case why would anyone believe this unsourced, unvetted and ultimately unverifiable story of skullduggery and freelance espionage?

Pepe says

So it was hard to read, and finish, but I did. It's not for everyone, but it did teach me a lot. At the end of the day, that made it worthwhile for me.

Anaszaidan says

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James Stephens says

When I pursuing my degree in Emergency Management Degree with a concentration in terrorism, this book opened my eyes and if you want to understand the reasons why terrorists do what they do then read how this covert operator infiltrated Al Qaeda and learned their ways. Other organizations have a very similiar mindset. 9/11 could have been avoided and this operator warned the U.S. with no avail.

Thomas Ptacek says

A good read, but I seriously doubt the veracity.

Richard Ambrosio says

Phenomenal book. It had me poring over it non stop, huddled over it every morning on the tube.

It's a gripping account of a Moroccan born spy who infiltrates an Algerian terrorist cell in Belgium and training camps in Afghanistan. He is then sent to London to start a terror cell and to raise money for the Jihad cause, but in reality, uses his proximity to feed valuable intel to MI5 and DGSE. It reads like a spy thriller!

Two other things stuck out in my mind. First, there was the incredibly nuanced picture it shows of fundamentalist Islam. I hadn't realised just how scornful Arab fighters were towards the Taliban and how even they regarded them as extreme in their actions and viewpoints. Or that they are scornful of KLA fighters and the lax ways of Kosovan Muslims. In telling its story, the book canvasses the panoply of extremists with their varying motivations and intensity, from Algerian to Chechen fighters.

Also, just how woefully inept the British law enforcement and intelligence authorities were in the 1990s when it came to Islamic terrorism. Clearly, they worked on models centred on the threat of Irish republican radicals, and no other threat seemed to hold their attention. They were hampered by robust legal protections afforded to all and a poorly defined legislative framework. Above all, the utter amateur hour that appears to go down in MI5/MI6 and the resulting disputes with the French.

A cracking read. Highly recommended.

Anita says

Easy to read account of Muslim from Belgium who becomes a spy for France and ultimately infiltrates the terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. Later he spies in London but becomes somewhat bored and disillusioned and eventually settles in Germany to retire and get married. Best thing about this book is that it is a non-U.S. view and discusses many of the misperceptions the West has about Islam, jihad, and events (attacks) that happened in Europe and beyond, especially in the 90's. Makes the distinction between violent and non-violent sects and shows how extremism is rationalized and fueled. Believable, interesting, different.

Laura says

I'm not sure where to begin with this one: the in depth "behind the scenes at a *jihad* training camp"? the ineptitude of the French (and British and German) intelligence services? the casualness of dedication to a specific *jihad* in favor of any *jihad*? All of the above?

Nasiri's tale of his life as a spy is at times riveting and at times horrifying but always readable. When describing his training, I kept thinking about how the guns, explosives and chemicals were simply toys to him - you can almost see him internally jumping for joy the first time he handles an AK-47. His motivations for joining in *jihad* are a mixture of belief in getting American (and European) influence out of Muslim lands, the opportunity to play with cool toys, and his desire to be "taken care of" by the DGSE.

I wonder how many other *jihadis* share his background and his sensibilities, and whether we will ever be able to find a middle ground.

Copy provided by publisher.

Diane says

This book was written by an Arab man who became involved with terrorist groups in the 1990s and then became a spy. He attended terrorist training camps as a spy, but later gave up his life as a spy when his heart was no longer in it.

The book is an exciting story of his life and contacts, and the author writes well. He does a good job of expressing his feelings, emotions, and reasons for his decisions. I wish that he would have included more analysis of why he believes people become terrorists. At the beginning of the book, he says that he understands how these people think, but he never develops this theme fully. Instead, he offers personal reflections, which provide some insight, but are limited in scope.

zewx says

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Elsie says

Omar's evaluation in the early pages of his book is very interesting. "This is the problem of modern Islam in a nutshell. We are totally dependent on the West--for our dishwashers, our clothes, our cars, our education, everything. This is humiliating, and every Muslim feels it. ... Once we had accomplished so much--in science, mathematics, medicine, philosophy. For centuries we ran far ahead of the West. We were the most sophisticated civilization in the world. Now we are backwards. We can't even fight our wars without our enemies' weapons." (p.38) He was not a devout Muslim but his time in the Al Qaeda camps certainly created conflict with his desire to perform jihad and fulfill his spy duties. As he worked with the French, British and German intelligence forces he was very frustrated with their lack of understanding of the Islamic issues. His frustration also included the willingness of Muslims to rationalize the killing of civilians under the guise of jihad. "Killing soldiers is war; killing civilians is murder." (p. 318). However, I was disappointed in Omar's conclusion: "I think the United States and all the others should get off our land, and stay off. I think they should stop interfering in the politics of Muslim nations. I think they should leave us alone. And when they don't they should be killed, because that's what happens to invading armies and occupiers." (318-319) I would like to think that progress in society would exclude war, that we could all live together as one happy family. But if all the terrorism would stop by the West moving out of any Arab nation, then wouldn't we also expect all the Muslims to return to their own nation?

Michael Simborg says

Very insightful and frontline view into the history and future of the "jihad" (as the West refers to it) and the many viewpoints and flavors this term evokes. Central to his story was a constant thread: ignorance seems to rule the West while justice seems to motivate the East. While I am in agreement with Omar's views about the "killing of innocents" in the "jihad" and that the West historically occupies and exploits other countries which, in turn, creates "terrorism", I do not agree with the "purity" of the movement noting the immense and ubiquitous amounts of corruption. With books like these it becomes painfully apparent how the agendas of our leaders are superimposed on the will of the people who elect them. Further, it was astounding to me to read how completely inept the "intelligence" agencies involved with combating terrorism truly were and possibly still are.

Top this off with the fact that this invaluable asset in this war was thrown to the wolves, abandoned and dishonored to the point where his only option was to write a book, risk his life in the process, to be a human

again. Shame on the West and shame on America, Europe and other nations that support puppet governments, occupation and genocide in the name of "democracy, peace and freedom." WHAT A JOKE!

Mohamed Yehia says

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