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978-0-521-73743-2 - The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global, Second Edition

Fawaz A. Gerges

Frontmatter

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THE FAR ENEMY, SECOND EDITION

Fawaz A. Gerges' book on Al Qaeda and the jihadist movement has become a classic in the field since it was published in 2005. He argued that far from being an Islamist front united in armed struggle, or jihad, against the Christian West, as many misguided political commentators and politicians opined, Al Qaeda represents a small faction within the jihadi movement and is criticized by other groups who prefer to concentrate on changing the Muslim world, rather than making the fight global. In this new edition, Professor Gerges demonstrates that not only have the jihadis split ranks, but voices from within the ultrareligious right, who previously supported Al Qaeda, are condemning its tactics as violent, unethical, and out of accord with the true meaning of jihad. In fact, most Muslims worldwide have rejected Al Qaeda's ideology and strategies and blame Osama bin Laden and his cohorts for the havoc the organization has wreaked on their communities. Al Qaeda is in the wilderness, suffering a massive erosion of authority and legitimacy in Muslim eyes and facing a fierce revolt from within. As Professor Gerges warns, Barack Obama and his administration would do well to use political and socioeconomic strategies rather than military means to ensure that Al Qaeda stays there.

Fawaz A. Gerges holds the Christian A. Johnson Chair in Middle Eastern Studies and International Affairs at Sarah Lawrence College. He also taught at Oxford, Harvard, and Columbia universities and was a Research Fellow at Princeton University for two years. Professor Gerges was a senior analyst and regular commentator for ABC television news from 2001 to 2007. He was also a commentator for *Morning Edition* on NPR. He has appeared on many television and radio networks throughout the world, including CNN, CBS, NPR, BBC, and Al Jazeera. Professor Gerges has won several academic awards, including an eighteen-month MacArthur Fellowship. His articles and essays have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Survival*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the *International Herald Tribune*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Nation*, the *Harvard Journal of World Affairs*, the *Oxford International Review*, the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, the *Middle East Journal*, the *Beirut Review*, *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi*, *Al Hayat*, *Al-Safir*, *Al-Nahar*, and many other journals and anthologies.

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*For all those who died on September 11
and the loved ones they left behind*

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The Far Enemy

WHY JIHAD WENT GLOBAL

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Sarah Lawrence College



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Acknowledgments

This book has been in the making since 1999 and is based on hundreds of interviews with Islamists, former jihadis, activists, civil society leaders, and opinion makers throughout the Middle East. I benefited greatly from a generous MacArthur Foundation fellowship and a Smith Richardson Foundation grant, which enabled me to spend two years in the region conducting field research, traveling widely, and spending countless hours talking to the rank and file, not just leaders, of the Islamist and jihadi movements. The interviews I conducted inform my analysis throughout the book and complement recently acquired primary sources. This book relies overwhelmingly on original material.

When the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, I decided to wait until the smoke had dissipated before I concluded the writing of the book. I am glad I did, because the aftershocks of the September 11 earthquake have shed more light on the internal dynamics, tensions, and struggles within the jihadi movement. I also did follow-up primary research to bring the story up to date. My hope is that the book makes a humble critical contribution, not to the polemical and charged foreign policy debate, but rather to understanding the road to September 11 and its aftermath: how and why transnationalist jihadis brought the war to American shores against the wishes of the bulk of their religious nationalist associates who wanted to keep the struggle focused on the home front. And to what extent is this global war a direct product of the internal strife among jihadis themselves?

In researching and writing this book, I have incurred many intellectual debts to friends, colleagues, and strangers who sat down with me for countless hours and shared with me their insights and views. In

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particular, I cannot do justice to the hundreds of activists, students, and opinion makers in Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and elsewhere who took the time to meet with me and enrich my education on the unfolding struggles in the region. They welcomed me in their homes and offices, put up with my nonsensical questions, and provided me with precious primary sources. This book is as much theirs as it is mine, although they might disagree with my conclusions and are not responsible for any existing errors of judgment or fact.

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I owe a special thanks to London University Professor Charles Tripp, who read an early draft essay of the book and was not discouraged by its lack of refinement. His critical feedback and insights forced me to contextualize the analysis and be more comparative. Needless to say, any remaining shortcomings are mine. Yezid Sayigh of London University also furnished me with conceptual and practical suggestions that helped me in revising the book. Kamran Bokhari, senior analyst at Strategic Forecasting, Inc., read the entire manuscript and made extensive notes throughout. The book is better thanks to his diligent efforts. Over the years Avi Shlaim of Oxford University has been and remains a source of inspiration and friendship. I also want to thank my friend J. Michael Mahoney, whose moral support has sustained me. I am grateful to Julie Kidd of the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, which has been a generous supporter of Middle East studies and my work at Sarah Lawrence. I also want to thank my research students, Marie Webb and Anthony Fleming, for their assistance.

Special thanks go to Ms. Marigold Acland, Senior Editor at Cambridge University Press, for her patience and commitment to this book. Although my contract stipulated that I complete the book by 2002, she just gently nudged me to plug along. More important, her critical feedback enriched the overall analysis. I also want to thank Ms. Shari Chappell, my editor at Cambridge, for shepherding the book from its early conception until birth; Shari's magical editorial touch has transformed the book. The entire team at Cambridge has been most helpful.

Finally, this book belongs to my family. They invested as much time and energy, if not more so, in making it happen as I did. I could not have traveled for long periods or written the book without Nora's love and encouragement; her intellectual feedback has guided the project since its inception. My children's tenderness and affection also kept me sane during those hectic days of travel and writing. Hannah never let a day go by without reminding me that I should hurry and be done with the book. Laith wandered in and out of my study showering me with kisses. From the outset Annie-Marie never tired of inquiring about "why did

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Al Qaeda attack America?" She motivated me to try to find intelligent answers to her question. Bassam helped me access key primary documents and listened closely and patiently to my chatter about the far enemy and the near enemy; he often had something critical to say. This book is a fruit of their love.

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Foreword

When my editor, Marigold Acland, asked me to update *The Far Enemy*, particularly the Prologue and Introduction, I read the book closely and concluded that its original arguments and hypotheses (supported by extensive primary evidence) speak for themselves and still stand. *The Far Enemy* engendered a critical debate about a forgotten truth: there exists no viable, formidable Islamist front united in armed struggle, or jihad, against the Christian West. Additions to and deletions from the two chapters would neither enrich the analysis nor shed further light on the jihadi phenomenon.

Instead, I authored a new substantive chapter, “Beyond the Far Enemy,” that advances a set of original and thought-provoking arguments about the future, or lack thereof, of jihadism in general and Al Qaeda in particular. Based on current primary data and interviews with activists and militants in the region and Europe, “Beyond the Far Enemy” builds on the book’s previous findings and stresses some significant changes, particularly with respect to Al Qaeda and its loose network of affiliates: the massive erosion of Osama bin Laden’s claims to legitimacy in the Muslim world and, from within, a fierce revolt against the global jihad by former senior associates and a serious theological challenge by leading Sunni and Shia clerics. Key leaders of Al Qaeda and influential scholars have recently blamed bin Laden directly for the turmoil engulfing the Muslim world and have called on young Muslims to be wary of false prophets like bin Laden and his right-hand man Ayman al-Zawahiri.

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The balance of forces has shifted dramatically against Al Qaeda's global and local jihad in favor of reformed and repentant radicals and other moderate Islamists who are struggling, often against great odds and under enormous pressures, to acclimate themselves to gradual social and political change in their societies.

Bin Laden, Zawahiri (the current operational chief of Al Qaeda), and their associates have reached a conceptual dead end. They seem to be running on empty and to lack the strength to rejuvenate their fading cause. And although Al Qaeda appears to have strengthened its foothold along Pakistan's tribal border with Afghanistan thanks to its connection with the Taliban in both countries, it faces insurmountable challenges in the Arab hinterland – its historic social and religious base of support.

Now, an overwhelming majority of Muslims view Al Qaeda through a prism that focuses on the monstrosity of killing noncombatants in general, not just Muslim civilians. Recent opinion surveys and my own field research confirm that trend.

A cultural revolution has been occurring within Islam. Key Muslim clerics, civil society leaders, and even former key militants have rejected Al Qaeda's gratuitous violence and stress the ethical and moral foundations of the institution of jihad.

Although this debate over the meaning and applicability of jihad raged among jihadis of differing conceptual and operational orientations immediately after September 11, 2001 (it is discussed at length here), it has only recently reached critical mass within the Muslim world: there are very few buyers of the global jihad ideology.

Unfortunately, many former U.S. officials, along with terrorism experts, pay little attention to the debilitating legitimacy crisis faced by Al Qaeda as well as to the substantial erosion of Muslim support for the terrorist group. These officials insist that Al Qaeda is on the rise and that the "Long War" against Al Qaeda should be America's top military priority in the coming decades.

Tragically, George W. Bush and his foreign policy team did not learn much from their strategic blunders since September 11. One would hope that the Barack Obama administration would not only shorten

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the “Long War” but will also discard the terrorism prism through which Bush and his administration viewed America’s relations with the world of Islam.

Fawaz A. Gerges
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