



Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century

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.

Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century Details

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From Reader Review Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century for online ebook

Molly says

As someone who isn't in the field of psychology or anti-terrorism, this was an interesting read. The author does a good job of breaking down the different waves of modern Islamic terrorism, and highlighting what does and does not drive some people to terrorism but not others.

However, the book falls apart about halfway through. The premise still stands throughout, but the reasoning is jumbled and all over the place as the book goes on. By the time you get to the conclusion it's like reading a string of stream of consciousness rants from a guy on a street corner that you swear you've already heard.

There were several points that I had to skip over mentally because the references were included without much context and no footnotes. The author has a habit of dropping obscure examples of Islamic terrorism at the end of a point that would only inform someone with working knowledge of contemporary terrorism, and without a frame of reference for the rest of us. It would have been nice to include a glossary or timeline of some sort for those references.

Overall, not a bad read to give your thoughts on terrorism a bit more nuance, but I'm not sure it's a seminal piece of terrorism research.

Diane says

This book follows up on Sageman's earlier work on modern-day terrorism. It begins with the author's methodology and his defense of that methodology. It then briefly covers the material the author discussed in his earlier work. Then, it moves on to the central thesis of the book, namely, that jihadist organizations are currently decentralized groups of cells that are not tied together by any overarching leadership structure. Sageman believes the internet is now being used to both radicalize young Muslims and train them in terrorist technique. He also believes that this explains both the growth in terrorist incidents over the last couple of years, and their decreasing effectiveness.

Yusuf Agah says

Full of information. Easy to read. I strongly recommend this book for those who are interested in terrorism topic.

Ellen says

MAJOR DISCLAIMER: I'm the publicist for this book and while I've never used GoodReads as a marketing venue, I wanted to bring this particular book to your attention. It's very politically provocative and has been getting a lot of recent media attention (see David Ignatius's op-ed in yesterday's Washington Post, followed

by James Fallows' and Andrew Sullivan's responses at TheAtlantic.com). Not bad for a university press book. Sageman's thesis is that Al-Qaeda is no longer the unifying force it once was and that the current threat is due to small spin-off terror groups that organize via the Internet.

Your feedback is appreciated.

Dharma Agastia says

Read this for a counter-terrorism class. Sageman's updated "terror network" is relevant to the new trends in radicalisation.

Jason Sands says

Good

This is one of the few books to approach terrorism from a social science point of view, and I appreciate that. Unfortunately, many of his recommendations have no chance of being implemented in the real world.

Biju P.R. says

I read it for a chapter on my forthcoming book Lovescape. Nice book that give me lots of information regarding the various manifestations of Jihad. how jihad occurs and what are its linkages and how it operates in the twenty first century particularly in an age where networks are more important for any activity, this book is a good read. you can see how terror operates in techno rich networked world here in this book. my chapter on jihad immensely benefited from it.

Channon says

Interesting book, important contribution towards terrorism studies and definitely worth a read. Only three stars because Sageman does a couple things here that irritate me. In his defense, I'm easily irritable :)

1) Sageman begins the book with a discussion about how we rely on anecdotes and focus on the individual to explain the root causes of terrorism. He and I both believe that this is misguided. Sageman favors a more scientific approach to the study of terror networks. He then goes on to provide several anecdotes of individuals and why each embraced terrorism. These anecdotes such as the story of the Laghriss twins are actually very fascinating but I sat there reading, scratching my head and thinking . . . "I thought he was rejecting. . . anecdotes. . . no? Okay."

2) He argues that a top down structural approach is inadequate, as is a bottom up focus on the individual. Sageman believes that we should focus on a middle range -- a methodology that takes into account both the micro and the macro. As one who is always for embracing the nuanced "grays" of black and white extremes, I appreciate Sageman's analysis here. Having said that, this seems to me just to be a smaller version of the

macro study of terrorism and if one is arguing that the roots of terrorism are structural, then how do you account for the vast majority of people that do not become terrorists?

3) The idea that the threat from AQ Central is diminishing. I would agree with him there but I think to conflate the diminished threat of AQC and AQ altogether is a mistake. I will give Sageman a break because this book was published in 2008 but the recent homegrown terror attacks and attempts in the US from Major Nidal Hasan and Faisal Shahzad respectively demonstrate that terrorists do not necessarily need support and training from AQC in order to be lethal (or potentially lethal in the case of Shahzad and Abdulmutallab).

I think Sageman is on to something with the middle range I just reject the idea that we need to examine the root causes of terrorism with a scientific method -- it will fail.

Akshat Upadhyay says

Detailed yet muddled in some parts.

Anthony says

There is quite a lot I do not agree with. The description of how Europe's social infrastructure leads to the indirect funding of terrorism (through financial resources from welfare and time that people have on their hands because they - as the author describes - do not need to work for a living like in the US) does not at all make sense to me. In my opinion the author glorifies the US political system and presents European countries in a light that does not reflect my own experiences.

There are many other aspects I also do not agree with. However, the book asks many very important questions and also offers many interesting insights. I also agree with many of the suggestions on how to deal with the challenges of radicalization. Overall the book is clearly worth reading - if read very critically...

SpaceBear says

The basic argument of this book is that al-Qaeda is both a social network and an actual organization, however the organization (what he calls 'al-Qaeda central') has limited ability to assert control over the broader movement. As a result of this, al-Qaeda is now a 'leaderless jihad' in that small groups and cells form around the world and pursue al-Qaeda Central's aims and ideology, however do not have any real connection to the centre, while the centre is highly limited in its ability to assert control or orders over the periphery.

Jens says

Again, read this for a class on understanding and disrupting terrorist cells. Sageman is probably the best counter-terrorism analyst out there right now. He brings to light the current state of jihadist groups like Al Qaeda, their socioeconomic background, their psychological state, etc. through a three-level analytical

framework geared at determining reasons for radicalization at a micro, macro, and mid-level range. We see here how essential the group dynamic really is in radicalization.

Benjamin says

While insightful, this book is a little disorganized, so it is difficult to extract the nuggets it contains. Sageman is a much better public speaker. Having heard him speak before was very helpful.

Rapoport's four waves of terrorism (32):

Anarchism

Anticolonialism

Left wing radicalism

Religious

Religious terrorism can also be divided into three waves:

First wave - upper/middle class, fought Soviets in Afghanistan, older, often criminal records for political activity (48-9,62)

Second wave - inspired by first wave and Muslim suffering in Bosnia/Chechnya/Philippines/Kashmir, younger, well educated, solidly middle class, some have criminal records for minor crimes (49,62-3); culminated in 9/11, destroyed by subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, could harden borders to combat (71)

Current third wave - Inspired by Iraq, have to combat radicalization because internal (71); leaderless, young, children of immigrants or 2nd or 3rd generation, lower middle class, less education (may be a factor of age), domestic terrorism, petty criminal records often to fund actions (49-50,63)

Greg says

A must-read book for anyone who is interested in the evolution of terrorism. The author studied every western terrorism event since the first world trade center bombing. He also delved deeply into the background of each terrorist arrested for these events. He dispels the common myths that terrorists are poor (most are middle class), religiously brainwashed (most lack even a fundamental understanding of their own religion and 2/3 are secular), doing it for sex and the 72 virgins (most are married and have mistresses as well) and uneducated (most have a college education). After dispelling the myths, he describes exactly how terrorists are recruited and how Islamic terrorism has evolved in the last few years.

Fascinating research and a fast read.

Richard Schneider says

Provides valuable insight into self-radicalization. Critics say it is weak on terrorist organization and recruitment power.

Bruce Hoffman offers the counter view - that terrorism is alive and well, organized, and well-financed.

Our policy probably needs to be based on a combination of both the Sageman and Hoffman.

Sageman's book, however, will help interpret what you hear/see on the nightly news, or read in what's left of print journalism -- most of which is wrong.

I am considering dealing with this subject, however, as a result of reading Sageman's book in a future Vic Bengston Investigation mystery novel, but three other titles are in the queue ahead of it.
