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Walid Phares: "FUTURE JIHAD: TERRORIST STRATEGIES AGAINST THE WEST"

Palgrave Macmillan; New York, 2006.

When airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the world was paralyzed with shock. As minutes went by, people, nations and cultures started processing these events in their own way. There was a matter of personal loss, not just for the families of those that died, but for the entire world that watched the leading nation bleed. After the initial shock, questions started emerging: "who would do that?" and "why do they hate America?"

Once again the world was split in two; those that knew where that danger was coming from and those that had no idea. Here lays one of the main values of *"Future Jihad: Terrorist strategies against the West"* Dr. Walid Phares' intellectual and culturally fluent book about the past, present and future of the global threat that the world is facing.

The author uses September 11 as a starting point because the severity of the attacks brought the ideology responsible for it, into focus. Phares writes: *"In the corner of the campus where I was teaching on that day of infamy, I felt very much alone: What I had known, researched, and watched building year after year was finally here, ravaging my new homeland. I was as shocked as anyone, but unlike many I was not surprised. What had come to pass was something I had studied and tried to warn others about for more than two decades. It made me more determined to impact the future of what I knew was coming from that point on."*

Being one of the ones that knew what the attacks were about and where they were coming from, the author goes back in history to educate the reader and gives a sober and rational multi-centurial map of ideology behind terrorism. Who are the Jihadists? Where do they come from? What do they want? These are some of the questions that are answered in Phares's book.

While the Western debate over political correctness spends a great deal of time questioning terminology to be used to refer to militant Islamic terrorists, Phares overcomes this linguistic question in the English vocabulary, as well as the culture, by offering a simple solution – call them what they call themselves – Jihadists. Indeed, public debate over the meaning of Jihad – spiritual experience or war - contributed to the confusion over identifying the enemy. Phares defines Jihadists as twentieth century terrorists that want to revive wars fought by the Islamic Empire almost fourteen centuries ago while achieving three main objectives: liberation, unification and reestablishment of the caliphate.

The author's thesis is that we have to undo years of misconceptions that caused lack of public and expert knowledge of the Jihadi threat. Once a solid notion of the threat is established we can begin to fight the threat itself.

Starting from the beginning, from the Caliphates through the fall of the Ottoman Empire and again through the World Wars to our present, historical dates and events are connected to a chilling timeline. Continuity of the Jihadist threat becomes apparent while the reader's quest for reason and knowledge is stimulated to pose questions of our future.

For policy makers and the broader public that were stuck in the Cold War mentality, the idea of Jihadism came as a surprise. Phares writes: " *The 9/11 Commission released a tape, recorded a few minutes after the tragedy in Washington, D.C., in which a fighter pilot rushing to the scene over the Pentagon exclaims: 'Gosh, the Russians got us!'* " This tragic truth testifies to the fact that a decade after the end of the Cold War Russia was still perceived as a strategic enemy number one, while the Jihadists that were already attacking Americans domestically and internationally for over a decade were not.

Several chapters of the book are rightfully devoted to understanding the root causes of America's failure to predict and prevent terrorist attacks on its soil. "Cultural lobotomy," as Phares calls it, refers to intellectual and political establishment downplaying the threat of Jihadism. Both media and academia distorted the main stream image of Jihad by outcasting experts who warned of Jihadi terror activities. Without these experts and a proper debate, the public was unaware of the fact that radical and militant Islam posed a threat to their life.

On the international level, Phares compares strategies used in different conflicts and points out that jihadist terror attacks were not registering as priority, not even in cases of attacks on US soil. The World Trade Center terrorist hit in 1993, and the Khobar Towers bombing in 1996, did not result in all-out mobilization against Islamic networks. On the other hand, in 1994, "Operation Uphold Democracy" showed

overwhelming US military and diplomatic readiness to go against a military coup and reinstall properly elected government of Haiti.

Phares's decades of experience, education and life in both East and West culture make his writing easy to follow. In writing about Wahabi Saudi influence around the world, Phares explains that prior to WWII, the Saudis were a marginal federation of tribes that controlled holy sites and deserts of Arabia and that after the end of the war they made two important choices: first, to respect international law for the sake of their unification and empowerment and secondly, they made a choice to ally themselves with the lesser of two evils among the infidels, therefore, choosing the capitalist US instead of the communists. Their purposeful choices along with the discovery of oil resources, gave the Saudis enormous wealth that they started investing in schools around the world teaching Islamic fundamentalism.

In the today's global society there is little that can surprise us but this book manages to do just that. As we see Taliban rule and Al-Qaeda's hate of the West, we are easily fooled into thinking that these threats are localized and specific to a certain culture and region. The author shows us through multiple examples in the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Darfur, Sudan, Europe, Middle East, South America, and other parts of the world that the threat of Jihadism is just as modern and global as the society we live in. *Future Jihad* exposes the effort by the Jihadists to wage an ideological war against Western civilization and democracy.

Furthermore, in it's afterward the book provides a regional overview where the analysis of Jihad is refined through current geopolitical examples worldwide. Phares makes recommendations and guidelines for U.S. and international policies in respect to legal framework, democracy promotion, national security and education. In the end the message is clear: educate and raise awareness of U.S. and international public opinion about Jihadism, use counterterrorism strategies and promote pluralism and democratic reform in the Greater Middle East.

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