

Ashot Manucharyan: Books on Terrorism

Ten years ago, on August 23, 1996, Osama bin Laden declared 'holy war' on the United States of America in writing. The reason he gave was that the superpower dared to keep Saudi Arabia occupied – 'the country of the two holy sites'. At the same time, he appealed to his brothers in faith to unite against 'the coalition of Jews and crusaders' and to drive back the 'attackers' who allegedly committed 'massacres on Muslims'. By the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Islamic holy warrior tried to provoke an escalation of the battle, hoping to drive Washington to acts of reprisal and to embroil more than one billion Muslims in a holy war against the West. Since then, Osama bin Laden has been teaching and threatening the global public on television, the radio, the internet, and the press, while parts of the Islamic world make him a symbolic figure. To his followers, he has been a hero for a long time anyway. What does Mr bin Laden want to tell us, a man who calls himself a fighter for justice and the 'true God'?

While most of the books on Islamic terrorism that appeared directly after September 11, 2001, were hurriedly cobbled together, the reader may inform himself about this phenomenon in a large number of brilliant books today, some of which are presented in this collective review. In concrete terms, these include the recommendable works of Bruce Hoffman, Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, Marwan Abu-Taam, and Ruth Bigalke as well as Milt Bearden, James Risen, Oliver Roy, Jason Burke, Jean-Charles Brisard, Bob Woodward and Richard A. Clarke, Avi Primor, Aaron J. Klein and Simon Reeve, Geert Mak, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

In their books, these scientists, politicians, diplomats, former secret service members, and journalists show that the tragedy of September 11 was only the tip of the iceberg, for invisible beneath the surface there is, lying low until today, the tremendous power of Islamic fundamentalism that radical clergymen and leaders of terrorist groups know how to exploit skilfully. It is to be welcomed that Arab sources on Al-Qaeda, especially the speeches and writings of terrorist leaders, have also been published in German by now, giving a broad audience an opportunity to get acquainted with the terrorists' ideology in the original. Fortunately, there are now – next to excellent works on international terrorism from the USA, France, and Great Britain – German authors such as Guido Steinberg, Jürgen Elsässer, Egmont R. Koch, Bruno Schirra, Gero von Randow, and Ulrich Ladurner who, through their publications, contribute towards a better understanding of this complex phenomenon.