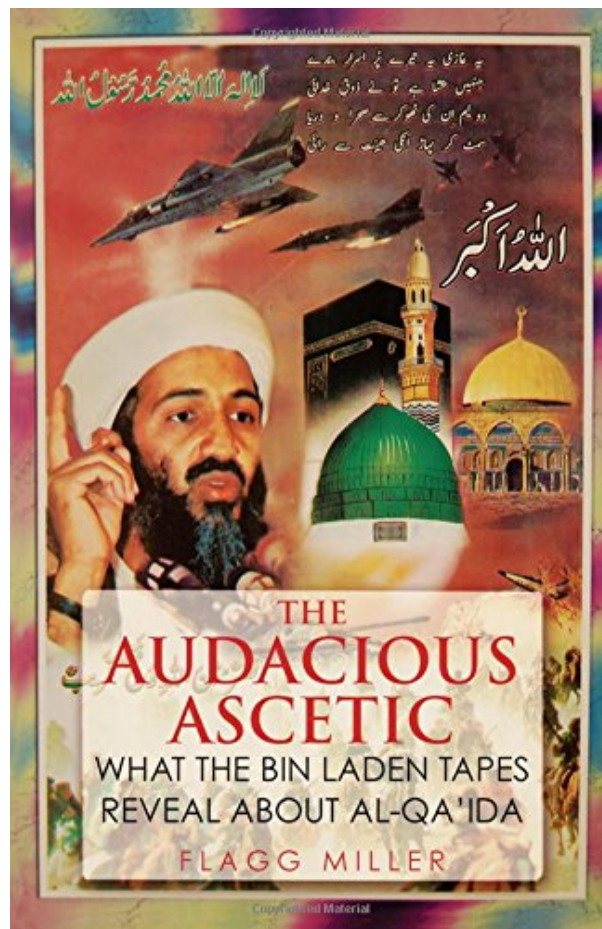
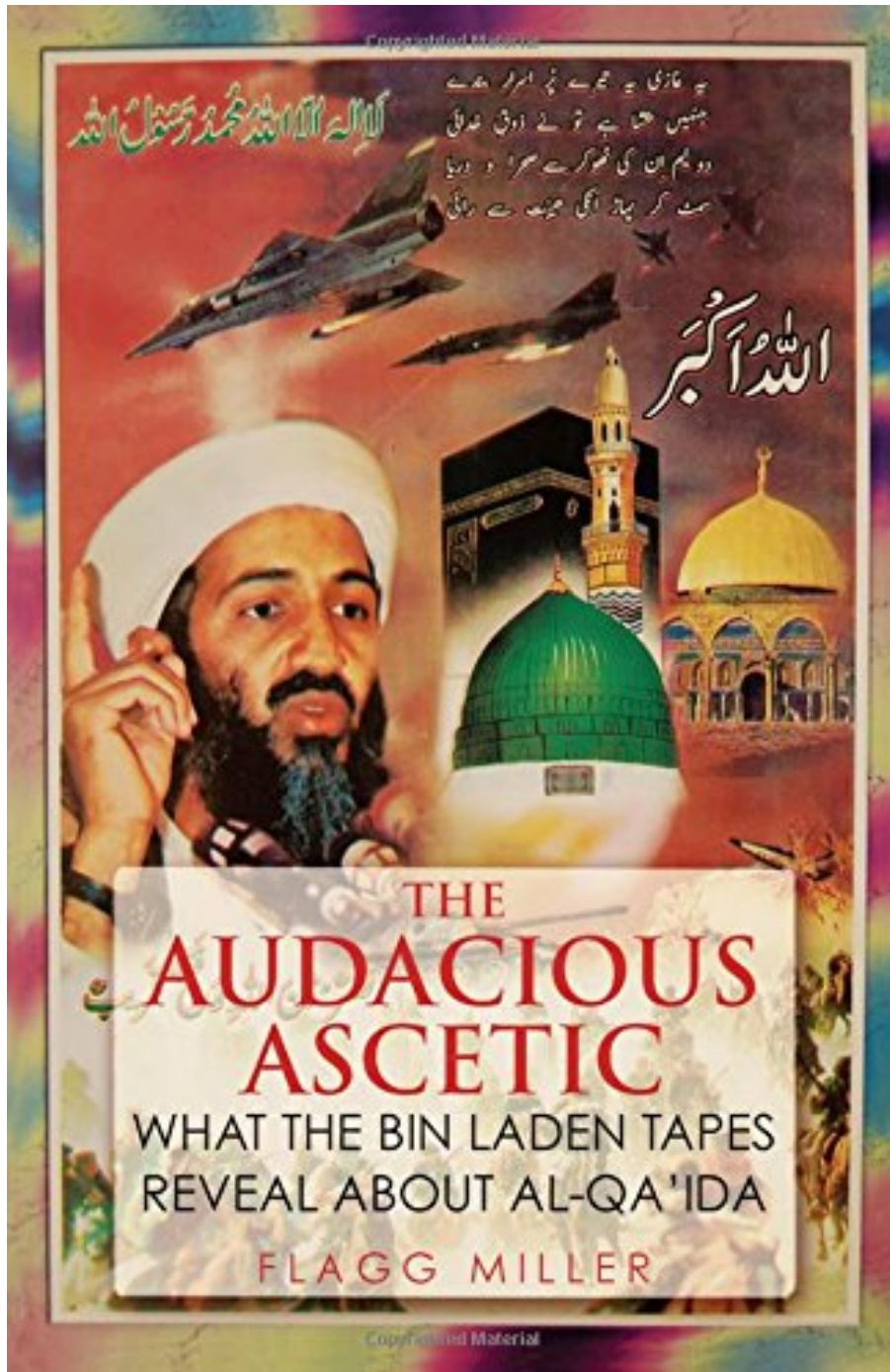


THE AUDACIOUS ASCETIC: WHAT THE BIN LADEN TAPES REVEAL ABOUT AL-QA'IDA BY FLAGG MILLER



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Review

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In late 2002, over 1500 audiotapes were discovered in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in a house once occupied by Osama bin Laden. *The Audacious Ascetic* is the first book to explore this extraordinary archive. It details how Islamic cultural, legal, theological and linguistic vocabularies shaped militants' understandings of al-Qa'ida, and, more controversially, challenges the notion that the group's original adversary was America and the 'far enemy'. Miller argues that Western security agencies' 'management' of Bin Laden's growing reputation went awry. When magnified through global media coverage, narratives of al-Qa'ida's coherence were exploited by Osama and his militant supporters for their own ends.

Focusing on over a dozen previously unpublished speeches by Bin Laden as well as on discussions by top al-Qa'ida leaders and Arab- Afghans, Miller chronicles the Saudi radical's evolving relationship with a host of Muslim insurgencies that found his stripe of asceticism (zuhd) tactically useful, especially when circulated via audiotape. These recordings also reveal militants' disenchantment when Bin Laden, marginalized through the '90s, began pandering to Western television networks in his attempt to direct heterodox Islamist armed struggles against America. Such audio evidence exposes al-Qa'ida's lack of coordination before 9-11 and invites scrutiny of dominant narratives of Western law enforcement, intelligence and terrorism analysts.

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What Did Osama bin Laden Say?

By Dave

The early years of Osama bin Laden as a jihadist and his activities in Afghanistan were not well known to many in the U.S. except for a few CIA and FBI analysts who began tracking a man who abandoned his family fortune to fight the growing U.S. influence in the Islamic Holy Lands.

Strategically, the United States set out on a war against an ideology that most U.S. policymakers did not understand and often they did not listen to the few that had some idea of the emerging threat of al-Qaida.

Dr. Flagg Miller is a linguistic anthropologist who has spent nearly a decade cataloging, translating, and interpreting a treasure trove of over 1,500 audio recordings of bin Laden and other jihadist leaders recorded between 1997 and 2001. The tapes served as an audio library for visitors to bin Laden's Khaddar home and show the wear and tear of being listened to by his visitors.

Read the full review at Strategy: The Bridge <https://medium.com/the-bridge/what-did-osama-bin-laden-say-b8863d2bcb51>

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Gratitude for a crucial perspective

By Amazon Customer

Staying true to the content of the tapes, Dr. Miller gives us the gift of allowing us to enter the mind of one of the most villainized people on the planet and his cohort. Like a fibonacci spiral, careful contextualization of key audio recordings unfolds a much-needed dimensionality to a chapter of human history that had been so marred by hate and misunderstanding as to be virtually incomprehensible. This foundational work helped me, as a lay person to gain understanding and abate my frustration with the conundrum presented to us by mainstream media about binLaden, Al-Qaeda, Jihadism, and Muslim Extremism by situating their complexity in their proper context, politically, linguistically, and historically. Dr. Miller, without taking a heavy-handed or moralistic stance on the perspective the audio tapes present, lets us grapple with the many ways humans can build stories of an evil other. This objectivity is a powerful and rare quality to find in any book, especially on such a controversial topic. I am grateful to Dr. Miller for providing a cooling gust of wind on a topic often stifled by unproductive foregone conclusions. A testament to its impact: I plan to re-read this book and have saved the link to the audio on my browser.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

The best book on al-Qaeda, global jihad and Osama bin Laden.

By Amazon Customer

With his access to ~1200 audio tapes belonging to bin Laden, most emerging from the mujahideen milieu in the years during and after the Soviet Afghan Invasion, Miller is able to do something that no other historian has done, which is construct a plausible narrative of what was happening in the decade leading up to 9/11 that relies not on grotesque assumptions but primary documents. It becomes apparent that much, if not all, of the narrative we've inherited about al-Qaeda is one constructed by professional foreign policy analysts and members of the US Government through guesswork and poor translation, and one later adopted by bin Laden as a marketing tool.

The tapes offer a different story, and Miller's cogent analysis leaves the reader wondering about the inherited legacy of cultural miscommunication and willful ignorance undergirding the last sixteen years of global life.

Truly the most shocking book that I've read in many years!

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