



The Audacious Ascetic: What the Bin Laden Tapes Reveal About Al-Qa'ida

Flagg Miller

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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Focusing on over a dozen previously unpublished speeches by Bin Laden as well as on discussions by top al-Qa'ida leaders and Arab- Afghans, Miller chronicles the Saudi radical's evolving relationship with a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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