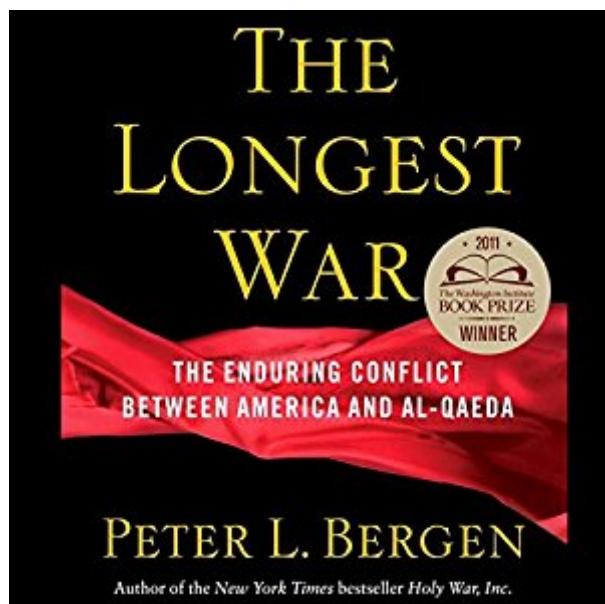


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The Longest War: America And Al-Qaeda Since 9/11



Synopsis

Ten years have passed since the shocking attacks on the World Trade Center, and after seven years of conflict, the last U.S. combat troops left Iraq - only to move into Afghanistan, where the 10-year-old fight continues. The war on terror rages with no clear end in sight. In *The Longest War*, Peter Bergen offers a comprehensive history of this war and its evolution, from the strategies devised in the wake of the 9/11 attacks to the fighting in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and beyond. Unlike any other book on this subject, here Bergen tells the story of this shifting wars failures and successes from the perspectives of both the United States and al-Qaeda and its allies. He goes into the homes of al-Qaeda members, rooting into the source of their devotion to terrorist causes, and spends time in the offices of the major players shaping the U.S. strategic efforts in the region. At a time when many are frustrated or fatigued with what has become an enduring multigenerational conflict, this book will provide an illuminating narrative that not only traces the arc of the fight but projects its likely future. Weaving together internal documents from al-Qaeda and the U.S. offices of counterterrorism, first-person interviews with top-level jihadists and senior Washington officials, along with his own experiences on the ground in the Middle East, Bergen balances the accounts of each side, revealing how al-Qaeda has evolved since 9/11 and the specific ways the U.S. government has responded in the ongoing fight. Bergen also uncovers the strategic errors committed on both sides - including the way that al-Qaeda's bold attack on the United States on 9/11 actually undermined its objective and caused the collapse of the Taliban and the destruction of the organizations safe haven in Afghanistan, and how al-Qaeda is actually losing the war of ideas in the Muslim world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The magazine 'The Economist', in its review, noted that Bergen offers nothing new in his new book on the US and its war against Al-Qaeda, 'The Longest War'. I have to agree on that point; however, what Bergen offers is a complete history of the association between Al-Qaeda and America that as you read it is almost painfully familiar. Bergen provides a history of Al-Qaeda's beginnings, bin Laden of course, the bombing of the Cole, 9-11, bombing of our embassy in Africa, the war in Afghanistan, the Bush team's desire to go into Iraq, Guantanamo, water boarding, the on going war in Afghanistan, individual terrorists & sects and their various attempts/plans, and of course the endless search for Al-Qaeda/bin Laden. He also covers the actions of, although not in great detail, George H. W Bush, Clinton, W and Obama. This book provides quite a lot of detail in only 350 pages of narrative. The downside is only the last chapter or two address the most recent searches for Bin Laden and tries to pin point where he is and his present state of affairs. I do wish that Bergen had included some of his insights that he shared recently during his interview with Bill Maher where he spoke with genuine optimism that the U.S. can succeed in Afghanistan. In his book, he does note that bin Laden had the support of 63% of the Pakistan in 2004 but it's down to 18% today, certainly a good sign. If you want a very good overall history of the war against Al-Qaeda, this is a good book to read.

This book is a good summary of the war on terror from the founding of al Qaeda in 1988 to just before the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011, when this book was published. This book gets five stars for all the useful information it contains. It refreshes your memory on all the events and their chronology. Who remembers, for example, that after 9/11 the shoe bomber came first in 2001, the plot to down planes with on board liquid explosives happened in 2006, and in 2009 we had the underwear bomber. The main problem with this book is that Bergen really has it in for Bush, but this is what you would expect from a CNN analyst. While constantly criticizing Bush, he glosses over important Bush accomplishments such as the capture of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the killing of al Qaeda in Iraq leader Zarqawi in 2006. Needless to say, when later describing Obama's accomplishments in the war on terror, he has no criticisms. But the Bush record has become news again with Trump's statement that Bush must share some of the blame for 9/11, and this is why I read this book, to review all the details. The problem with the Bush administration was that it had a Cold War mindset and saw the main threats to America still coming from states such as Iraq. This of

course was true of the whole country with only a few exceptions. What now seems evident in hindsight was not that evident in foresight. As expected, Bergen criticizes Bush for the Iraqi War. What people fail to realize is that Iraq was the most dangerous state in the Middle East and the US did not know what would happen next after 9/11. Saddam Hussein came to power in a bloody power grab in 1979, invaded Iran in 1980, started a nuclear program which the Israelis destroyed in 1981, used chemical weapons of mass destruction on Iraqi Kurds and others in the 1980s, invaded Kuwait in 1990, used terrorists to try to assassinate the elder Bush in 2003, implied he still had nuclear weapons, and defied UN resolutions until the US invasion of 2003. What the critics basically mean is that Bush was supposed to ignore all this because in hindsight we now know Iraq's nuclear program never recovered. Bush took the dangerous situation around 9/11 as an opportunity to invade Iraq and should be commended for his actions. But Bush mishandled the Iraqi War and this is really what the criticism is all about. People love a winner and not a loser. First, Bush invaded Iraq with 150,000 troops when his father had used 500,000 to drive Hussein out of Kuwait, a much easier task. Nevertheless, the invasion was successful while the occupation became a disaster. It would have gone much better if there had been 500,000 troops in Iraq. But Bush followed Rumsfeld's theory that US technology was so great that it could control Iraq with a relatively small force. This was Bush's biggest mistake. Then there were disastrous decisions such as firing all the Iraqi government employees and all the military, which left hundreds of thousands Iraqis unemployed, many with weapons and military training. But whether we are talking about Clinton, Bush, or Obama, they all take the same approach that Iraq must be treated as a nation like the United States. Iraq is basically a forced coalition of three separate groups who cannot live with each other: Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds. The Turkish Ottoman Empire controlled what is now Iraq for centuries and had a much better approach. They divided what is now Iraq into three provinces representing the three groups. I have believed this is the best solution from the beginning when we first learned about the make up of Iraq.

Though I speak Arabic and have lived in the Middle East, I am not an expert - but I do like to read on the subject and when I saw that the well respected Peter Bergen was coming out with a new book, I immediately decided to buy it as soon as it came out. This book is now my go-to book for friends/family who ask for a recommendation of one book to read on the subject: if you want to find an up-to-date, concise one volume history of the War on Terror/Iraq/Afghanistan, this is the one. Most people do not have time to read widely on the subject, but we should all know about it - so I believe this book fulfills an important role. Mr Bergen's story starts in a logical place, describing how

Osama bin-Laden became the Osama bin-Laden, then describing 9/11 - how it happened, why it happened, and what the initial US response was. All this in just the first four chapters - so the pace moves right along. The Iraq and Afghan Wars take up more than half of this work, but attention is given to several other important subjects such as global terror threats (chapter 8), extraordinary rendition (chapter 7), Al-Qaeda and WMDs (chapter 13), and the worldwide Muslim dialogue over Jihadism (chapter 17). It is worth drawing attention to the section on Muslim dialogue over Jihadism (chapter 17), which is a topic you will not find well treated in many other places, and many Americans assume does not happen at all - for the simple fact that they do not hear it. That is because it mostly occurs in other countries and in other languages, and the fact that it is included here is a significant and valuable contribution. At just under 500 pages, this book appears longer than it is - because only 51% of the book is actual text. The rest of the book is notes, sources, and an Index. It isn't clear why the author decided to include such a complete accounting of his sources for an introductory text rather than simply including a "selected bibliography," as is generally done. He may have been worried that the book would be controversial, but a book this short covering so much ground is somewhat hard to make contentious as simply reporting information consumes your space. A lighter, less intimidating book may have helped the book reach more readers. Though some on the right may find the obligatory Bush-bashing in the earlier sections of book frustrating, Bush is given due credit for the surge, and it is duly noted that Barrack Obama vigorously opposed the surge which did ultimately save Iraq. (For those on the left, simply reverse the order: though some may be frustrated at the criticism of Obama over the surge, there is plenty of Bush bashing...) Like many books of this type, the reader is sometimes left to wonder if the author remembers what it was like when the events described happened. For instance, so caught up in the analysis and the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that there was real, widespread concern that Iraq would arm terrorists with WMDs which everyone thought they had (according to post-war debriefings this includes Saddam's own generals up until right before the war). That fear, justified or not, was real, as was the real fear of further serious attacks. Writers often do the same thing when writing about the days of détente and the Soviet Union. Instead of acknowledging the very real role the fog of war plays, political actors are often ascribed evil motives, rather than simply criticized for being wrong. In all, though, this is a careful, concise history of the War on Terror, Afghanistan, and Iraq that is fully up-to-date. 4.5 stars out of 5. EDIT: 2/19/11 -- I just saw the book for the first time in print; I had read it on my kindle. While 49% of the text is notes/etc, not main text, it is all in small print -- so that it represents perhaps 1/10 of the total pages in the print bound book. Still, I can't raise it up to a full 5 stars for the other reasons mentioned.

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