(Photo by Hosam Katan, Reuters)

Members of al-Qaida's al-Nusra Front pause in a trench 25 November 2014 near the village of al-Zahra, north of Aleppo, Syria. Members of al-Nusra and other Sunni Islamist insurgents clashed with pro-government fighters in an attempt to capture the Shi'ite Muslim village.

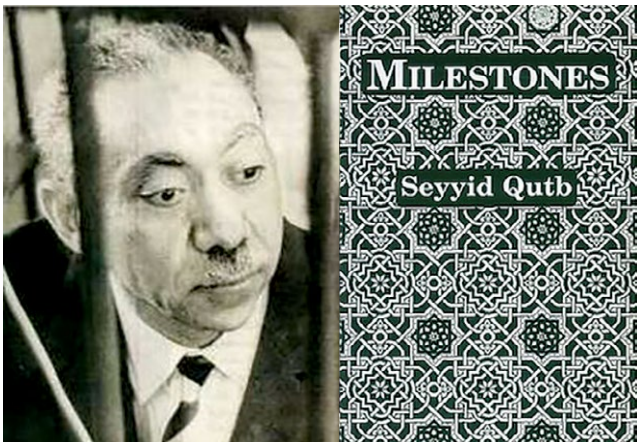
Understanding Today's Enemy

The Grand Strategists of Modern Jihad

Dr. Sebastian Gorka

Editor's note: The following article is a chapter extract from Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War, *by Dr. Sebastian Gorka, published here by his permission coincident with publication of the full book by Regnery Publishing, April 2016. Gorka is the Major General Matthew C. Horner Distinguished Chair of Military Theory at Marine Corps University. We appreciate his gracious permission to republish this highly relevant material.*

Just as one must study Carl von Clausewitz, Machiavelli, or Napoleon to understand the modern Western way of war, there are key writers and thinkers that those who wish to defeat our current jihadist enemy must acquaint themselves with intimately. In order to understand the strategy of today's global jihadist movement, one must understand the work of a handful of Islamists who wrote the most important strategic texts on war against the "infidel." These men are Seyyid Qutb, Ayman al-Zawahiri (the current head of al-Qaida), Brig. Gen. S.K. Malik, and lastly, the late American al-Qaeda leader, Anwar al-Awlaki. The works of these "big picture" Islamist thinkers together shape the actions and plans of all of today's jihadist terror groups, from Boko Haram to al-Qaida, from the al-Nusra Front to the Islamic State (IS).



(Photos courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Seyyid Qutb is author of the 1964 book *Milestones*, which became a field manual for jihadists. It remains a doctrinal text for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Milestones: All Must Fight for the Caliphate

Qutb, a minor Egyptian government official, is responsible for writing the most influential modern text on jihad. His 1964 book, *Milestones* (sometimes translated as *Signposts Along the Way*), has become the field manual for jihadists everywhere and remains a core doctrinal text for the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Qutb was a key member. Written after Qutb visited the United States on an exchange program soon after World War II, the book describes the reasons why the Muslim community has lost its preeminent position in the world and how the godless, infidel nation of the United States must be destroyed in order to rid the world of *jahilliyyah*, the pagan ignorance of Allah that once again has infected the minds and souls of Muslims across the globe.

In this violent purification of the world and the reinstatement of Islamic greatness through the re-establishment of the theocratic empire that was the Caliphate, the most powerful weapon is a "holy war," or jihad. Most significantly of all, Qutb is explicit in his belief that Islam is not to be understood as just a religion, but instead as a "revolutionary party," with a politically supremacist mission to mobilize the masses and capture global power for the glory of Allah. Islam for Qutb is not limited to a matter of personal belief. Again and again, in this short book, Qutb repeats that Islam has a mandate to re-create the Caliphate, but this time a theocratic empire that will span the world.

It is no accident that given this understanding, *Milestones* lifts heavily and frequently from other ideologies which promoted revolution, especially fascism and communism, which is why Qutb (and later Osama bin Laden) frequently used Marxist terminology such as the "vanguard" to explain the special role the small minority of "enlightened" religious revolutionaries has.

Qutb was eventually arrested by the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser for his central role in the Brotherhood and involvement in a plot to kill the president, and he was finally executed in August 1966. However, his ideas on jihad and religious war live on and his book is available not only all over the Middle East but also in many Islamic "cultural centers" across the United States. This is a problem because the other places it is most often found is in the possession of high-value jihadist targets on the battlefield and on terrorists apprehended here in the United States.

Qutb's ideas very specifically link insurgent leaders like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of IS with individual terrorists, such as the Tsarnaev brothers responsible for the Boston Marathon bombing, because each of them concurs with the fundamental analysis in *Milestones* that:

- Muslims are once again like the pagan Arab tribes of Mecca in the time of Mohammed.
- They have failed to submit themselves to the will of Allah, in part because they are following leaders who are themselves false Muslims and puppets of the West, but also because they have been corrupted by the heretical values of the infidel.

- As a result, there is no true Islamic state today, only pretense and falsehood.
- The answer is a return to Allah and the reestablishment of his sovereignty on Earth through the re-creation of his theocratic Caliphate in a jihad.

For Qutb, being a Muslim was not a personal, theoretical, or individualistic exercise. One could only be a true Muslim if you took part in eradicating the infidel and all his influences, and taking an integral part in the war that would bring the Islamic empire back.

Zawahiri: One Superpower Down, One to Go

Zawahiri, who now heads al-Qaida after the successful special operations mission in Abbottabad, Pakistan, that killed bin Laden, has also contributed significantly to the canon of jihadi strategy. More so, in fact, than his former boss.

An Egyptian surgeon born into a very prominent Cairo family, Zawahiri was also a member of the Muslim Brotherhood like Qutb, but would later become one of the leaders of the terror group Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Arrested and imprisoned by the Egyptian authorities for his extreme beliefs and personal goal to bring down the Cairo government, Zawahiri would eventually be released and end up in Pakistan during the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s, where he would use his medical skills to heal the *mujahideen* who had been wounded fighting the Russians.

(Image courtesy of The Counter Jihad Report)

Knights Under the Prophet's Banner, published by the London-based *Asharq al-Awsat*, is Ayman al-Zawahiri's book describing his political and religious world views. He explains what role a global jihadi movement should play in the future, and that Muslims are responsible to conduct jihad.

In Pakistan, Zawahiri would eventually meet bin Laden and be drawn deeper into the world of the "Arab mujahideen"; Zawahiri would become a member of the Arab Services Bureau (the MAK in Arabic). After the head of the MAK, Abdullah Azzam, was killed in 1989 and bin Laden took over the organization, the Saudi's puritanical Wahabbi-ideology would begin to meld with Zawahiri's Muslim Brotherhood-influenced ideas, and subsequently the MAK would transform into al-Qaida with Zawahiri as bin Laden's new deputy.

(Photo courtesy of WIkipedia)

Osama bin Laden (left) sits with his adviser and translator Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri (right) during an interview with Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir on 8 November 2011 in Kabul. After bin Laden's death, Zawahiri assumed the principal leadership role over al-Qaida.

The renamed jihadi group was now redefined as bin Laden and Zawahiri gave it a global mission. Instead of focusing exclusively on one type of target, foreign invaders on Muslim soil—or un-Islamic apostate Arab leaders and their governments in the Middle East—*The Base* would do both, and most importantly for America, al-Qaida would now take the jihad into the "belly of the beast," into the heart of infidel lands. This move into "enemy territory" would eventually result in al-Qaida

managing to do that which no other jihadist group had ever achieved.

Since the Muslim Brotherhood had declared that the Caliphate must be re-established back in the 1920s, and by force if need be, scores of jihadist groups had been founded around the globe, from the Middle East to Southeast Asia and from Africa to Central Asia. Some had been more successful than others, with the Brotherhood itself being able to jeopardize the stability of several Arab nations with assassinations and sundry subversions and conspiracies. But each one was stymied in their shortsighted focus on the proximate infidel or apostate enemy. Whether it was Egyptian Islamic Jihad trying to take down the secular government in Cairo, or jihadist groups fighting the "heathen" Indians in Kashmir, they were all limited by their operational parochialism. Under bin Laden and Zawahiri, this would all change with al-Qaida becoming a self-appointed "vanguard" of a global movement that would eventually stun the world with the death and destruction it was able to realize in Tuesday, 11 September 2001.

Al-Qaida now retooled itself along three fronts:

- Exporting jihadists to new guerrilla theaters across the globe
- Becoming the global "face" of Jihad in terms of propaganda
- Establishing cells across the world to execute terrorist attacks against the infidel

In the 1990s, al-Qaida would recruit new jihadi fighters and deploy them to Bosnia in the Balkans, Chechnya in Russia, Kashmir in India, and to all significant war zones where Muslims were fighting non-Muslims. At the same time, bin Laden would come out of the shadows of the war in Afghanistan and record video and audio messages for a global audience of willing holy warriors, eventually becoming such an international media "personality" that outlets such as CNN and ABC would interview him.

All of this was happening as bin Laden and Zawahiri were recruiting Muslims fundamentalists, not only to become just guerrilla fighters but also to become clandestine operatives in terrorist cells embedded within Western infidel nations, or nations where there was enough of an infidel presence to afford a target-rich environment. As a result of this network being successfully established in more than fifty nations around the world, al-Qaida was able to take the Holy War to the *kuffar* (infidel) again and again and again in the 1990s, with bin Laden and Zawahiri being responsible, or otherwise connected, to:

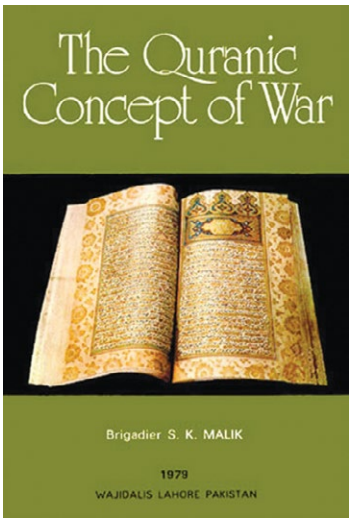
- The first World Trade Center attack
- The 1998 American Embassy bombings in East Africa
- The bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemen in 2000

Despite all of these successful attacks against America during that decade, as a nation we were not prepared for, nor were we able to detect and prevent the deadliest terrorist attack in history, and so on 11 September 2001, al-Qaida was catapulted to a position of worldwide significance that other jihadist groups had only dreamt of.

Throughout this period, and especially after the 9/11 attacks, when al-Qaida was discussed, it was bin Laden who garnered all the attention, and for obvious reasons, since he was the leader of the group, and because he presented an image that fit the stereotype of the ascetic jihadi warrior. This focus on bin Laden failed to recognize that it was Zawahiri who was the ideological master of al-Qaida. It was the older Egyptian jihadist who had studied and honed his theological and rhetorical skills in the dock of the Egyptian court system and the prisons of Cairo who would engage online most often with other Muslims to explain and justify the new global campaign of terror that al-Qaida had unleashed. This role was crucial to building the al-Qaida brand amongst potentially sympathetic Muslims around the world.

In preparation for the reaction to the 9/11 attacks and the worldwide attention they would bring, Zawahiri went to the lengths of penning a semi-autobiographical book on his experience of jihad, and why the time had come for all to choose sides in the religious war to end all wars. Sent to an Arabic outlet in London, *Asharq al-Awsat*, which published and serialized the work online just two months after the attacks, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*—or *Warriors Under the Flag of Mohammad*, more colloquially—built upon the themes of both Qutb and Azzam, but reformats them for the new age of holy war in which al-Qaida is the global jihadi "brand" for the twenty-first century.

In brief, Zawahiri's argument is that Islam must rejuvenate itself with an assault on all that is un-Islamic and that this revival to greatness will come through each believer taking up the sword of jihad. The time has



(Image courtesy of The Gorka Briefing)

S.K. Malik, a general officer in the Pakistan army, wrote *The Quranic Concept of War* in 1979. The book has become one of the most influential treatises on why jihad is necessary and how it must be fought. The preface was written by Gen. Zia ul-Haq, a former military dictator over Pakistan, who deemed holy war and spread of Islam by force an obligation for all Muslim believers.

come for all humans to choose which side of history they will live or die on. The Arab mujahideen of Afghanistan, the founders of al-Qaida, have shown the way. In the 1980s, there were two global superpowers. One, the Soviet Union, which was foolish enough to invade Muslim land when it deployed its troops into Afghanistan. This led to the "best Muslims" deciding to fight in a holy war against the kuffar invaders. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned, the jihadists won, a feat only possible because they were fighting for Allah and Allah made their victory possible.

Not only did the mujahideen defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, two years later their enemy imploded when the USSR disbanded itself on Christmas Day 1991. Now at the dawn of a new century there is only one infidel superpower left standing, the United States, and it too will fall to the sword of Allah's Army.

The final message of *Knights under the Prophets Banner* was very simple: God is on the side of the jihadists. Their eventual victory over all disbelief, including the destruction of America, is inevitable.[1] The members of the human race have one simple choice to make: join the "Caravan of Jihad" or be destroyed.

General Malik: War Against the Soul of the Infidel

However, the ideological and strategic thinker of greatest importance to the global jihadi movement today is the one most people, and even members of the American intelligence community, have never heard of.

In 1979, just as the seminal events mentioned above were unfolding in Tehran, Mecca, and Kabul, an astonishing book was published in Pakistan by Malik under the title of *The Quranic Concept of War*. The book is remarkable not only in its direct connection to later events like 9/11, and its rationalization of such heinous acts, but also in the category-negating nature of its content. For *The Quranic Concept of War* is unlike any strategic tome in the canon of western military thought.

In it, the former general officer destroys the central tenets of Western military thought, most especially the seminal theories of Clausewitz. Since the earth-shattering campaigns of Napoleon, which were analyzed and explained by Clausewitz, western military academies and war colleges have taught as holy writ the Prussian's dictum that war is an instrument of the nation-state, a violent tool to be used in the furtherance of the national interest when all other tools fail. We teach that war is just an extension of policy, that war is politics with a gun, or as the great Prussian originally put it: "the continuation of politics with an admixture of different means."

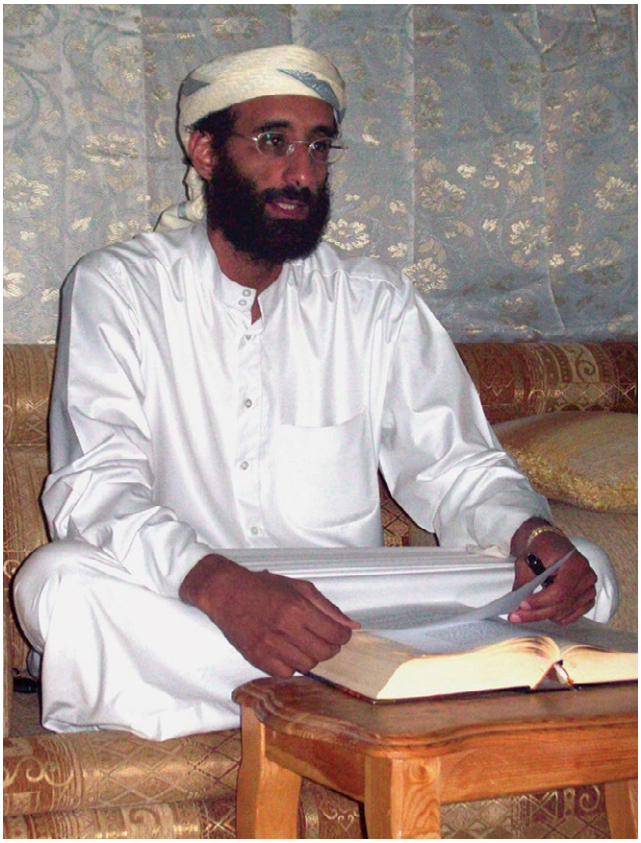
Yet Malik reverses centuries of understanding of warfare with his book by stating that war has nothing to do with the nation-state—which is in any case an heretical construct of the infidel West—or with serving the nation, or earthbound politics aims. Instead war is understood by Malik to only ever serve one purpose: the realization of Allah's sovereignty here on Earth. According to the Pakistani general, all war must only serve the objective of recreating the Caliphate, the theocratic empire of Islam, so that Allah's writ may once again reign supreme.

Secondly, again in a denial of Western strategic thought, Malik rejects the way the infidel goes to war. When American or Allied forces ready themselves for war they perform what is called *intelligence preparation of the battlefield*.[2] This analysis serves in part to identify what are termed "key vulnerabilities," or "centers of gravity" within the enemy's forces and infrastructure, to locate those most valuable targets, which if destroyed will incapacitate the enemy or force his surrender. Malik states that the infidel's concept of multiple centers-of-gravity or key vulnerabilities in war is just as fallacious as the idea that war serves political purposes. According to the Pakistani general, there is only one target of import in war and that target is not even physical. In war,

according to Malik, there is only ever one center of gravity: the soul of the enemy. The infidel foe must be converted to Islam or crushed.

Lastly—and here we see the relevance of this book to groups like al-Qaida and IS—since the only target that matters in war is the soul of the infidel, Malik concludes that the most effective weapon in war is terror. The enemy's belief system must be utterly destroyed and terror is the most effective way to do that. That is why 9/11 was so important. It is the highly symbolic suicide attacks, the crucifixions, the beheadings, the pressure-cooker bombs at marathon events, and the videos of immolations that will destroy the will of the infidel to go on.

Lest anyone think *The Quranic Concept of War* was the work of some radical and disenchanted fringe Pakistani officer, it must be noted that the book has a foreword by Gen. M. Zia-ul-Haq, chief of the army staff and president of Pakistan. In the foreword, Zia is clear, jihad in the cause of Allah "is not the exclusive domain of the professional soldier," echoing Azzam's fatwa in which a holy war was deemed an obligation of all Muslim believers.



(Photo by Muhammad ud-Deen, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

American-born Anwar al-Awlaki served as an imam and Islamic lecturer in both the United States and Yemen. His influence continues even after his death in 2011 by a U.S. drone strike. His sermons continue to stoke jihadi-violence, including having inspired such persons as Maj. Nidal Hassan and the Tsarnaev brothers.

These above works by Qutb, Zawahiri, and Malik have been found on high value targets, on jihadi leaders, in every theater of conflict where a holy war is being fought. The ideas of these strategic thinkers have shaped the worldview and objectives of al-Qaida, IS, and every jihadist terror group working today to recreate the Caliphate so Islam can reign supreme.

But when it comes to the threat of jihadi violence here in America and the danger of American service personnel and citizens becoming terrorists, there is one more individual we must discuss.

Awlaki: Leave Infidel Land or Kill the Infidel

Born in New Mexico in 1971 to Yemeni parents, Anwar al-Awlaki would become the spiritual jihadi leader for a whole new generation of terrorists. Labeled "the bin Laden of the Internet," Awlaki would train in Islamic theology and become the imam of a Falls Church mosque in Virginia before ending his days as one of the most senior leaders of al-Qaida. He was killed on the orders of the White House in a drone strike in 2011.

Awlaki's significance, even after his death thanks to the scores of videos and audio recordings he made, was to bring his understanding of American culture and society to the challenge of recruiting young Americans to the cause of jihad, so making a holy war attractive to a post-Afghan war generation.

This became especially important after the 9/11 attacks brought a robust American national security response, which meant that another similar attack, executed by Arabs from the Middle East traveling on U.S. visas, would be much, much harder.

In fact, Awlaki's hand, or his influence, can be found behind:

- The Fort Hood massacre, where he was in contact with the killer Maj. Nidal Hasan
- The attempted Times Square bombing by Faisal Shahzad
- The Christmas Day bomb plot by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, and even
- The Boston Marathon bombing

Awlaki's importance was best illustrated by his ideological and theological roles in the Boston bombing. I had the honor to serve as an expert for the U.S. Attorney's Office in the preparations for that trial, which was the most significant post-9/11 attack until San Bernardino, California, in December 2015.

In preparing the case, I was given access to the jihadi materials found on the surviving Tsarnaev brother's hard drive, documents that have been disclosed during the court proceedings and that should be mandatory reading for all those who wish to understand how jihadi terrorism is a living, breathing threat walking the streets of America.

Tsarnaev had multiple issues of the al-Qaida magazine *Inspire* downloaded from the Internet, as well as a series of audio lectures by Awlaki titled, *Hereafter*, which focus on the rewards a devout Muslim will receive in heaven when they become *shaheed*, martyrs in the cause of the Caliphate.

In one of the issues of *Inspire* [online magazine] from 2010, Awlaki pens his own article titled, "Shaykh Anwar's Message to the America People and the Muslims of the West," and includes the key statement:

> I for one, was born in the U.S., and lived in the U.S. for 21 years. America was my home. I was a preacher of Islam involved in non-violent Islamic activism. However, with the American invasion of Iraq and continued U.S. aggression against Muslims, I could not reconcile between living in the U.S. and being a Muslim, and I eventually came to the conclusion that *jihad against America is binding upon myself, just as it is binding on every other able Muslim.*

Most significantly, Awlaki gives a very operational choice to Muslims living in un-Islamic countries such as America, a choice based upon the principle of *al wala al barra*. Originally simply a call to do that which pleases Allah and reject that which Allah would not like, Awlaki now tells Muslims of America and the West that today *al wala al barra* must be understood thusly:

> To the Muslims in America I have this to say: How can your conscience allow you to live in peaceful coexistence with a nation that is responsible for the tyranny and crimes committed against your own brothers and sisters? How can you have your loyalty to a government that is leading the war against Islam and Muslims?
>
> Hence, my advice to you is this: *you have two choices: either hijra [migration] or jihad. You either leave or you fight.* You leave and live among Muslims or you stay behind and fight with your hand, your wealth and your word. I specifically invite the youth to either fight in the West or join their brothers in the fronts of jihad: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

Awalaki was the catalyst for several of the most serious attacks and jihadi conspiracies occurring on U.S. soil after 9/11. His message, transmitted in professional and attractive media, appealed to American citizens and immigrants in ways that the old and stolid preachings of the senior al-Qaida never could.

Today his influence continues after his death, just as it informed the Tsarnaev brothers in their attack in Boston almost two full years after Hellfire missiles killed Awlaki the man.

Assessment of Impact of Key Jihadi Theorists

The message of a holy war is alive. It is stronger than ever thanks to the former al-Qaida off-shoot in Iraq deciding the time for Caliphate is here. The new Islamic State will not stop until it is destroyed or it destroys us. There are no negotiations with totalitarians, especially religious totalitarians who see the rest of the world as infidels to be converted, enslaved, or killed.

For the last fifteen years, we have been losing this war. Egregiously in fact, with tens of thousands killed around the world in the name of Allah, and now in the name of the new Caliphate of IS and its new emperor, al-Baghdadi.

Jihad has become a threat to all that is decent in the world and foremostly to America, the nation that embodies the values of individual liberty and freedom that is so antithetical to the global jihadi movement. So what is to be done? How do we win? We learn from the lessons of the last war we fought against totalitarians, the Cold War we won against communism. We apply the approach of George Kennan to understand the threat against us and then we craft a strategic response as good as Paul Nitze's TOP SECRET NSC-68 to crush our enemy. ■

Biography
Dr. Sebastian Gorka is the Major General Matthew C. Horner Distinguished Chair of Military Theory at Marine Corps University and chair of the Threat Knowledge Group. Specializing in irregular warfare and jihadi strategy, he is a regular instructor for the U.S. Army Special Operations Command's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, and U.S. Special Operations Command. He served as an expert for the Department of Justice during the Boston Marathon bombing trial.

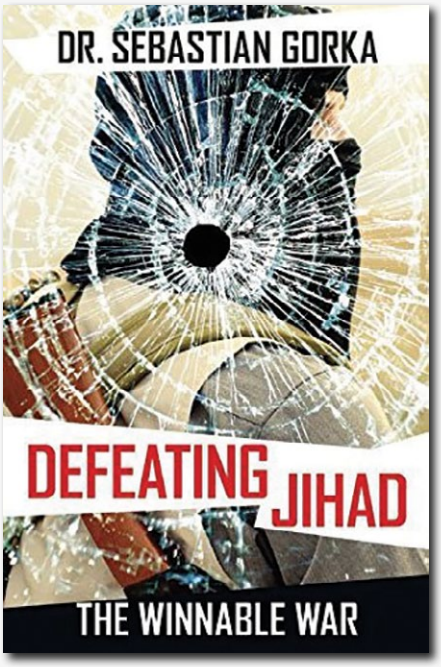
Notes

1. It is fascinating to parallel this "inevitability of victory" theme with Marxist totalitarianism, which also took as an article of faith the fact that communism will win and destroy capitalism and democracy. All that humans must do is choose whether they will join and build the "Workers' Paradise," or end up on the "ash heap of History."

2. In recent years, the phrase "intelligence preparation of the battlefield" has fallen victim to political correctness within the Pentagon. Today it is most often replaced with the new official phrase: "intelligence preparation of the environment," lest someone have the impression that we actually are at war.

Much the same thing happened when our information warfare professionals at Fort Bragg were told that they no longer performed psychological operations against our enemies, but instead were to execute military information support operations.

Welcome to the *Alice in Wonderland* world of euphemisms in a time of war.



MR We Recommend

For those who found the above article insightful, Dr. Sebastian Gorka of Marine Corps University discusses in much greater detail the ideological and philosophical foundations of modern Islamic terrorism in *DEFEATING JIHAD*. His book provides an in-depth study of the doctrine of the global jihadist movement and outlines a strategic plan to defeat groups like al-Qaida and the Islamic State.

For more information, see www.TheGorkaBriefing.com.