

# Book Review: The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda

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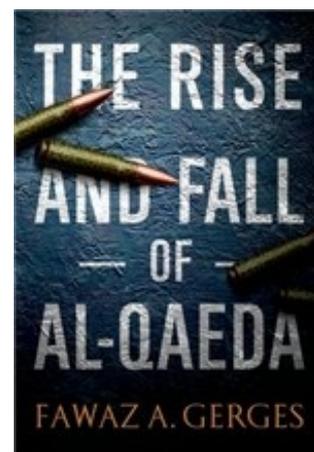
10.10.2011

*Manuel Almeida is in LSE's Department of International Relations. Here he reviews the latest book from LSE's Professor Fawaz Gerges entitled *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda*, published by the Oxford University Press.*

On the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, pundits, politicians and the press alike recalled an idea that has become familiar over the last ten years: 9/11 changed the world we live in forever. What has repeatedly passed with less scrutiny than it warrants, however, is the fundamental question of why Al-Qaeda still matters so much. To put it so bluntly might seem either naïve or an offence to the memories of the thousands who feel like victims of the fruit of Bin Laden's creation. Yet it is precisely 9/11's bloody legacy that renders this question essential.

In his new book *the Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda*, Fawaz Gerges, professor of Middle Eastern politics and international relations at LSE, tells us with unrivalled insight how we reached this stage. Following on from his earlier work, including hundreds of interviews with current and former jihadists across the Middle East, Gerges aims to contextualise the nature of the threat.

Intimately related to the attempt to draw a line between the perception of al-Qaeda's threat and its real capabilities, another of the essential aims of the book is to debunk some of the myths about al-Qaeda that have taken hold in the American imagination. According to the author, without laying these myths to rest, there will be no closure to the US War on Terror, a war that has been too costly in blood and money, not to mention twisting to breaking point the values of tolerance and democracy up to which America claims to live.



Al-Qaeda is still dangerous. Yet, according to Gerges, the organisation and other local groups represent a security irritant, not a strategic threat to the West. The inability of US policymakers to acknowledge this fact has, in Gerges's view, brought about, or at least precipitated, a power shift in the international system away from unipolarity to a multipolar system. Launched ten years ago, "*The War on Terror*" – as coined by its creators – has been boomeranging ever since.

Osama bin Laden is gone, there is apparently no-one who can fill that void, the organisation enjoys no real support from the Muslim public, and its remaining members are essentially in hiding or on the run in Yemen and Pakistan. We are thus presented with a case that, more than al-Qaeda's resilience, it is the blindness of those who are obsessed with it that keeps the organisation strategically relevant.

Engaging and convincing in its argument, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda* leaves one wondering whether the idea of *jihad* against the "far enemy" will perish alongside al-Qaeda Central (if or when that happens), or if it can outlive bin Laden's creation.