

**Landscapes of the Jihad:
Militancy, Morality, Modernity**

Faisal Devji

Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005. 164 pages.

In recent years, more has been written about jihad than any other single topic related to Islam. Faisal Devji tries to shed light on the people behind the slo-

gans, documents concerning terrorism, and their inner logic by analyzing the writings, interviews, and communiqués of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, as well as the will of Muhammad Atta (pp. 113-15). These and other illustrations clearly reflect the ideological viewpoint of the “jihadists.”

This book, an interesting historical and cultural analysis of the so-called “jihadi” movement and its representatives today, focuses on the globalization of jihad’s moral and aesthetic dimensions. The author deals with its conceptual landscapes, namely, al-Qaeda’s models of belief and action. In his preface, Devji suggests that both the 1998 terror attacks against the American embassies in Dar al-Salaam and Nairobi and 9/11, all undertaken by al-Qaeda, turned jihad into a global weapon of spiritual conflict. Thus, its focus has extended far beyond its original struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Devji explains: “Two factors make the Jihad into a global movement: the failure of local struggle and the inability to control a global landscape of operations by the politics of intentionality” (p. 31).

This globalization goes beyond territory, strategy, culture, or politics. It is now described in sweeping ethical terms, as shown in the broadcasts, writings, and interviews with Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Jihad has become global, and so has its language: “The very language of the Jihad, after all, is English” (p. 158). In this globalized jihad, the impact of deeds is more important than words: “The globalization of the Jihad lies precisely in the unintended consequences of its acts” (p. 14). To him, this global and metaphysical jihad reverses the West’s metaphysical dominance.

The fourth chapter describes the mass media’s role as the intermediary and promoter of globalized jihad in the West. The mass media validates Islam’s global and universal character through its broadcasts about jihad: “Existing as they do primarily and even originally by way of reports from broadcasters like the BBC, CNN and now al-Jazeera, these sites of global Islam have achieved the kind of universality denied even to the most spectacular of traditional practices, such as the annual pilgrimage to Mecca” (p. 93). Martyrdom, as one expression of jihad, flourishes in the media because “only in mass media does the collective witnessing that defines martyrdom achieve its full effect” (p. 95).

Devji points out a popular conspiracy theory among Muslims that blames Washington for 9/11. The alleged evidence is the film “The Long Kiss Goodnight,” in which a dialogue between an FBI agent and his colleague suggest that bombing the World Trade Center was planned and conducted by Washington. Devji perceives this as proof that “simple political intentions no longer suffice to explain events in a global landscape” (p. 89).

This contemplation might be inaccurate, since conspiracy theories exist with or without the media. Devji also describes a kind of cooperation between the Jihadists and the media: "It is almost as if the Jihad is here fulfilling the desire of mass media for real horror, but on the same model as reality television shows" (p. 105).

His examination of the Mujahiduns' behavior, as influenced or inspired by James Bond movies (pp. 91-92), is refreshing. Devji points out other movies that have inspired al-Qaeda operatives, such as "Dune," "Terminator," and "The Matrix." He tells us that, in violation of Islamic norms, some of the 9/11 suicide-hijackers drank alcohol, gambled in Las Vegas, and even attended lap-dances in clubs (pp. 16-17) a few days before their attacks. To a Muslim "fundamentalist," this indicates that many of the participants in these "martyrdom operations" were not devout Muslims and did not follow the Salafis' or the Wahhabis' strict puritanical code. Devji uses this comment to argue that al-Qaeda's theory and practice are not necessarily based on Salafi or Wahhabi doctrines.

Devji does not appear to have a good grounding in classical Islam. For instance, he mentions the "green birds" that martyrs expect to see in heaven (p. 110). He tells us that this was a prophetic hadith, but cites only an Internet website. In addition, the major focus is on jihad's present and future. The reader needs more background on its past in order to understand it in its present form. Jihad is repeatedly compared with other products of globalization, such as multinational corporations, anti-globalization activists and environmental groups, social justice organizations, supporters of disarmament, and anti-abortion groups. Devji argues that "jihad makes Islam into an agent as well as a product of globalization by liberating it from its specific content" (p. xii). One has to remember that jihad movements appeared centuries before the globalization and anti-globalization movements.

Devji's final assertion (pp. 163-64), that Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri are real revolutionaries, is odd. It suggests, misleadingly, that Bin Laden is not only the most notorious Islamic terrorist today, but that he is really a hero, a truly mystical, monotheistic, and revolutionary leader. This erroneous framework confuses readers, who must abandon their commonsense perceptions of terror, violence, democracy, and militancy to consent to his theory.

Olivier Roy's latest study of jihad (*Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* [Columbia University Press: 2004]), a coherent social book, would compensate for the failings in Devji's book. Devji himself refers more than once to this book (e.g., pp. 4, 27, 42, and 161), but, unfortunately, does not follow his thorough scholastic method.

Devji argues that al-Qaeda practices jihad as a global phenomenon in the context of a globalized world in which Muslims cannot overcome the American superpower. Therefore, it can only globalize its struggle and work patiently to achieve its goals. Although he offers different and sometimes refreshing insights into modern jihad, a welcome change from conventional analyses, this book focuses on jihad's partial and marginal features and is not always convincing.

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