

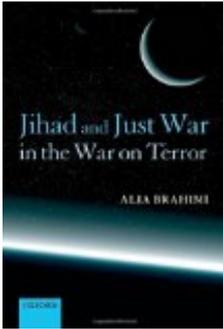
Book Review: Aggression, America and Al-Qaeda: framing the war on terror

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2011/01/30/book-review-jihad-and-just-war-in-the-war-on-terror/?pfstyle=wp>

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Sara Yasin reviews the latest book by [Alia Brahimi](#), finding a timely and important understanding of the relationship between the west and Al-Qaeda.

Jihad and the Just War in the War on Terror. By Alia Brahimi. Oxford: Oxford University Press. January 2010.



Jihad and the Just War in the War on Terror explores the justifications used by both sides in the war on terror. [Brahimi](#), a research fellow at [LSE Global Governance](#), as well as a senior research associate of the [Changing Character of War](#) programme at Oxford, challenges the way in which we understand the actions of both Al-Qaeda and the Bush administration. Much of my own adolescent life was spent in post-9/11 America and as a member of a Muslim community in the south of the United States, I spent a great deal of time trying to distance myself from the 'evil' version of Islam that seemed to be at war with our nation. Throughout my experiences, I have seen how much confusion

and frustration there is about the war on terror, and how much there continues to be, all making Brahimi's work timely and highly significant.

Brahimi argues that changing the way in which we frame the war on terror is crucial to countering terrorism. Understanding the war on terror in terms of good and evil assumes that both 'Islam' and 'the West' are acting upon long-standing and static traditions. Brahimi challenges the reader to change the way in which they understand the war. She shows that both the Bush administration and Al-Qaeda are a departure from the traditions and philosophies that they use to justify their actions, and that they are actually controversial as well as a departure from their respective communities. Brahimi shows the parallels between the just war arguments of the Bush administration as well as Al-Qaeda. Although making these comparisons is not central to her argument, they help in showing that both groups were 'acting at odds with the just war tenets in their own civilizations.' Thus, she shows not only the complexity of the matter, but also how viewing the war on terror in such terms allows for such misunderstandings to occur.

While some may argue that the war on terror symbolizes a clash of civilizations, Brahimi argues that what is actually going on is a 'clash' within the respective communities. What is important is not a war between 'Islam' and 'the West', but an entirely different problem. The author shows that both the Bush administrations, as well as Al-Qaeda, utilize moral arguments that borrow rhetoric from both faith and more 'modern' philosophies and traditions. Both groups departed from the traditions of their communities, and this is important because often times either Western culture or Islam are viewed as the basis for a moral argument. Viewing it in such absolute terms is not only counter-productive; it also creates more room for confusion and misunderstanding. Brahimi points not to a difference in philosophy, but to aggression as central to the conflict. The justification for both sides has little to do with religious ideology or culture. Both the Bush administration and Al-Qaeda articulated themselves in terms of religious ideology and self-defence. Brahimi explores the history of such frameworks, and shows that the just war traditions within both Christianity and Islam

'reinforce the modern, secular framework that makes aggression an international crime'.

I was surprised about how little I actually knew about Al-Qaeda and its history. What was most important was Brahimī's analysis of Al-Qaeda. She provides the reader with a look into the justifications and the inner-workings of the organisation. While some Muslims would like to merely position them as a relic of the past, Brahimī shows how complex political Islam really is, and how Al-Qaeda has even departed from the history of Islam. Often times, in the United States, we cannot have an open discussion about Al-Qaeda, except as identifying it as a force of evil. With Islamophobia becoming a widely discussed and accepted phenomenon, I think that a great part of this stems from a misunderstanding of not only Islam, but also of the actual relationship between Islam and organisations like Al-Qaeda.

Overall this book is enjoyable to read because it is clear, comprehensive and easy to follow. While having a more academic focus, Brahimī's writing style is still accessible. A crucial read for anybody interested in the subject.

Sara Yasin is a blogger at [Muslimah Media Watch](#).

Alia Brahimī spoke at a public lecture at the LSE on Thursday 26th January. Find out more [here](#).

[Click here](#) to download a podcast of the event (33MB, MP3).