

Understanding Jihad

David Cook

Author: David Cook is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University. His previous works include *Studies in Muslim Apologetics* (2002).

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Cover Description(s): *Jihad* is one of the most loaded and misunderstood terms in the news today. Contrary to popular understanding, the term does not mean “holy war.” Nor does it simply refer to the inner spiritual struggle. This book, judiciously balanced, accessibly written, and highly relevant to today’s events, unravels the tangled historical, intellectual, and political meanings of *jihad*. Looking closely at a range of sources from sacred texts to modern interpretation. *Understanding Jihad* opens a critically important perspective on the role of Islam in the contemporary world. Cook also describes some of the conflicts that occur in radical groups and show how the more mainstream supporters of these groups have come to understand and justify violence. He has appended a special section of relevant documents including materials related to the September 11 attacks and published manifestoes issued by Bin Ladin and Palestinian suicide martyrs.

Endorsements: Reuven Firestone and Richard Martin

Comments: Reuven Firestone – This book is important to current political and religious discourse on the role of Islam in today’s world and increases our understanding of the seemingly odd behaviors we observe through the media. A tremendous contribution.

Richard Martin – *Understanding Jihad* is one of the most helpful of the spate of new books to appear since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, on the debate about jihad in Islam. This book will help readers find their way through the vast literature by Muslims and non-Muslim scholars on what we can’t seem to get away from calling “holy war.”

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- Communique from the Armed Islamic Group (Algeria: Sept. 8, 1995)
- World Islamic Front for Jihad against Zionists and Crusaders: Declaration of War (February 23, 1998)
- A Communique from Qa ‘Idat Al-Jihad Concerning the Testaments of the Heroes and the Legality of the Washington and New York Operations (April 24, 2002)
- The Importance of Jihad, on the Goals of Jihad (by Ali al-Aliyani)
- Under the Shadow of the Spears (by Sulayman Abu Ghayth)
- Translation of “The Last Night”
- “Moments Before the Crash, by the Lord of the 19” (by Louis Atiyat Allah)

Rating on a scale of 1 to 5:

1. Not a good use of your time
2. Okay, but not that useful
3. Satisfactory, not great – but a good read
4. Loved reading it
5. Impactful, highly recommend

This book: 4-5

“Recommendation” Statement: The main reason I read this book was because of a statement by the late Nabeel Qureshi. He said, “The best book I have read on *jihad* is *Understanding Jihad* by David Cook.” He was right – this is a must-read for those who wish to dig a little deeper and have an honest look at *jihad*. Cook does not try and use *jihad* to bash Islam – but neither does he sugar coat anything. In his Afterword – Cook says, “There is no lack of evidence concerning the Muslim practice of *jihad*. The classical and modern works on the subject are voluminous, and they are documented by an examination of Muslim actions as recorded by historians. There can be no reasonable doubt that *jihad* is a major theme running through the entirety of Muslim civilization and is at least one of the major factors in the astounding success of the faith of Islam.”

If you want “a serious history of jihad” and how it has affected Islam today, this is a must read. If you feel you cannot read the entire book – turn to page 195 and read the appendix entitled “Translation of the Last Night.” This is a blow-by-blow account (laced with strong religious statements - as recorded by one of the hijackers) - of the hours leading up to the September 11 plane hijackings. Next, turn to page 202 and read “Moments Before the Crash, By The Lord of the 19.” These items are worth the read; sobering and shocking reminders of the seriousness of *jihadism* and *jihadists*. Again, I hope each GI team member can read this book.

Reviewer: J. Bennett, June 14, 2019