



When Tass speaks of terror, he knows, firsthand, what makes someone take this kind of drastic direction.

JOSEPH FARAH

TASS SAADA

WITH DEAN MERRILL

THE MIND OF TERROR

A former Muslim sniper explores what motivates ISIS and other extremist groups (and how best to respond)



Tass's life before Christ as an assassin for Arafat gives him a depth of understanding of this subject like none other. When Tass speaks of terror, he knows, firsthand, what makes someone take this kind of drastic direction.

JOSEPH FARAH

Founder of WorldNetDaily

What I appreciate about *The Mind of Terror* is the heart of my friend Tass Saada. This is a man who overflows with genuine *agape* love. Here is a powerful story of the gospel being lived out in the heart of the Holy Land, where there is so much brokenness. It is a testament of the truth "Love never fails." We as believers cannot allow differences to keep us from loving each other or listening to one another. This book will open your eyes to new things and delivers glorious hope!

RAY BENTLEY

Author of *The Holy Land Key*

Tass Saada knows Islamic terrorism—because he was involved in it. But he also knows the peace found in a relationship with Christ. Tass's personal journey has equipped him to share the hope he has found in the gospel with those we might think would be least receptive to the message. In this fascinating book, he shows us how to reach the unreachable.

JIM DALY

President of Focus on the Family

THE MIND OF TERROR

A Former Muslim Sniper
Explores What Motivates ISIS and
Other Extremist Groups
(and How Best to Respond)

TASS SAADA
WITH DEAN MERRILL



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PART ONE

**INSIDE
THE
TERRORIST
MIND-SET**

1

NO PLACE TO HIDE

THE MOMENT THE FIRST PLANE HIT the World Trade Center, I knew.

Stunned eyewitnesses and newscasters wondered if there had been a terrible breakdown in air traffic control. But I knew without a doubt that radical Islam had come to the United States.

For the previous nine months, God had been impressing upon me that I should travel, share my testimony, and warn people that Islamic extremism was at our doorstep. I had spoken to large congregations and to small groups in living rooms. I have to admit that not many listeners took me seriously. Most thought it could never happen here.

Then came September 11. All the false security disappeared. Within hours, it became known that the hijackers were Middle Eastern Muslims. And here I was, an Arab living in the United States. If you think *you* were shocked and distraught that day, you should have been in *my* shoes.

What will happen to us? I worried. How will this affect my wife, our two children? What do our friends think about us now? They all know that I come from a Muslim background. In fact, the FBI probably has that figured out too.

For the next few days, I didn't want to talk to a lot of people. I was too angry and upset over how this would disrupt my life and the safety of my family. I secluded myself, just watching the nonstop news on TV. I couldn't figure out how to react, what to say.

Near the end of that week, I had to go on a speaking trip, leaving my family at home in northeast Missouri, where we served with Heartland Ministries, a Christian farm and school for troubled teens and adults with addiction issues. While I was away, sure enough—the FBI came knocking. Not finding me, the agent from nearby Kirksville interrogated Karen, my wife, and Farah, our twenty-four-year-old daughter. He spent a half hour asking who I was, what I did, what my connections were. Then came the bombshell:

“Mrs. Abu Saada, we've had a report that your husband is friends with Osama bin Laden . . .”

Karen gasped, then laughed nervously. “Really?”

“Yes,” the agent said soberly. “Is that true?”

Karen shook her head and began to explain: “More than thirty-five years ago, when Tass was a boy, his father did business with Muhammad bin Laden, Osama's father, back in Saudi Arabia. Tass's father had an auto body repair shop, and he used to fix the bin Laden cars. So yes, the boy came along to the shop one day, and they met. But that was all.”

The agent kept taking notes, then replied, “Okay. I'm

sorry, ma'am, but we have to follow up on every lead we receive. Here's my card; have your husband call me, please."

Fear and Trembling

We didn't know exactly which neighbor in the area had given the FBI this tip. But of course, I had told my life story to public audiences more than a few times. So I called the agent as requested. I said, "Hello, this is Tass Abu Saada; my wife said you wanted to hear from me."

"Thank you for following up," he said in a polite manner.

I figured I might as well confirm what he probably already knew. "Yes, it's true that I was born and raised in a Muslim family in the Middle East," I admitted. "Yes, I'm a former terrorist—I fought with al-Fatah, Yasser Arafat's militia, as a teenager. Yes, even before that, I met Osama bin Laden once in my father's garage when I was about nine years old. Odd little kid, I thought—he hardly said a word. But can I claim today that I 'know' him? That's he's my 'friend'? No way. It was a one-time encounter, and that's all."

I took a breath and then continued. "I came to this country in 1974, settled down, got a green card, got a job, got married, became a father. I'm as upset about what happened last week as any other American."

"That's okay," the agent said. "I've been checking you out, and everything matches up. Don't worry; when you get back in the area, give me a call, and maybe we'll get together for a cup of coffee."

Whew. That was nice to hear. But it didn't mean I could totally relax. I knew I was still being scrutinized by people on every side.

Three or four months later, I got an e-mail from an address I didn't recognize. The subject line in the header caught my attention immediately. It read, "The Time Has Come. It Is Ripe"—and then there was a little icon of a bomb!

Who sent this? And why did they send it to me?

I didn't dare open the actual e-mail. I picked up the phone and called my FBI contact. I read the subject line to him and then said, "Should I just delete this, or what?"

"Oh, no, no," he answered. "Let me look at it. I'll come over to see your computer for myself."

Soon he and another agent showed up. He sat down at my computer and began pecking away. "Something is going on here," he said mysteriously. Then finally, "I'm going to forward this to our lab for further analysis."

I never did hear what, if anything, they concluded. I was left, like all other Americans, to wonder . . . and wait.

*There may have been
a time when we could
pretend the world had two
categories: "safe" places
and "unsafe" places.
That myth was forever
shattered on 9/11.*

In the fifteen years since then, terrorism has exploded across our world. And not just across the Middle East. An informal tally on Wikipedia for just one month (January 2015) counted twenty-nine major incidents, from the Philippines to Libya to France to Nigeria. The next month (February),

thirteen. The next month (March), twenty-two. The next month (April), twenty. The next month (May), thirty. And on it goes. In other words, one outbreak at least every other day.¹

Which attacks in this young century have been the deadliest? Look at this tale of blood:²

NO PLACE TO HIDE

When	Where	Killed	Injured	Responsibility
Sept. 11, 2001	New York City; the Pentagon; a field in Pennsylvania, USA	2,993	8,900	Al-Qaeda
July 2009	Maiduguri, Nigeria	780		Boko Haram
Jan. 2015	Baga and Doro Gowon, Nigeria	700?	300?	Boko Haram
Aug. 2007	Car bombings in Al-Adnaniyah and Al-Qataniyah, Iraq	520	1,500	Al-Qaeda
Sept. 2004	School in Beslan, Russia	372	747	Chechen separatists
July 2006	Commuter trains in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India	209	714	Small Islamist group that opposes Indian rule in Kashmir

There may have been a time when comfortable Westerners living in North America and Europe could pretend the world had two categories: “safe” places and “unsafe” places. Certain cities and countries were all right for vacationing, while others were not. That myth was forever shattered on 9/11, when terror came to New York’s financial district and Washington’s military headquarters. The only reasonable conclusion since then has been that the entire globe contains no place to hide. The question “Is it safe?” doesn’t apply anymore.

Many Players

Keeping track of the many terrorist groups is not a simple task, especially with the constant mergers, split-offs, and name changes. The US State Department keeps a formal list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) that, at this writing,

number fifty-eight.³ All the famous names are there, alongside many obscure ones you've probably never heard of.

The British government keeps a similar list that's even longer, called "Proscribed Terrorist Groups or Organisations."⁴

This roster contains sixty-seven groups, plus another fourteen that are particular to the Northern Ireland situation.

These are not just ragtag groups of outlaws running around in the shadows. These are sizable business operations.

An entire book could be written about each of the major players—but that is hardly our goal here. We already know, from the daily media, a great amount about them and what they do. Perhaps a way to keep this chapter's overview within bounds is to use the *Forbes* magazine list

of "The World's 10 Richest Terrorist Organizations"⁵—money being a key indicator of any group's ability to impose its will. As you will quickly see, these are not just ragtag groups of outlaws running around in the shadows. These are sizable business operations.

1. Islamic State (acronyms "ISIS" in English, "DAESH" in Arabic) and as many as forty-three affiliates.⁶ Annual turnover, according to *Forbes*: \$2 billion. Sources: oil sales; kidnapping and ransom; collection of taxes and "protection" monies; bank robberies and looting.

Estimated number of fighters: 30,000.

Control so far: large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

Goal: to destabilize Middle Eastern governments, erase the boundary lines of the current map (drawn mainly by the British after World War I), and set up

a whole new caliphate across the region that implements true and faithful Islam.

Most infamous for: beheadings of Western journalists, Coptic Christians, and others; crucifixions; stonings; burning victims alive (for example, a captured Jordanian pilot locked in an iron cage—January 2015).

This group did not arise out of nowhere; it was previously “al-Qaeda in Iraq” until it splashed into the world’s headlines in mid-2014. Its brutality is not accidental; it is meant to shock the West—and at the same time to strike fear into the hearts of local people and governments. This is ISIS’s conscious strategy for destroying the current order and setting up a return to Islamic purity.

ISIS has openly declared that it is not fighting against Israel . . . for now. What that means is the present problem is not Israel; rather, it is Arab disunity. ISIS disdains the current Arab kings and presidents, considering them apostates, reprobates, and sellouts for their cooperation with the West, enriching only themselves. Once ISIS turns the Arab peoples into a new entity—perhaps the “United Arab States” (UAS, like USA?)—it will *then* be positioned to go after Israel (and its rich friends in the West: Great Britain, the United States, and others). In fact, we are already seeing ISIS fighters slipping into the throngs of desperate Syrian refugees fleeing toward Europe.

(For further information, see the thirty-two-page “Special Report: The Islamic State” posted online by the Clarion Project⁷ or read Graeme Wood’s in-depth

article “What ISIS Really Wants,” published in the *Atlantic*, March 2015).⁸

2. Hamas. Annual turnover: \$1 billion. Sources: taxes and fees; strong-armed businesses (anything from banks to fish farms); financial aid and donations (especially from the wealthy Gulf state of Qatar as well as Iran).

Control: currently, just the Gaza Strip (139 square miles).

Goal: to dislodge Israel so that a Palestinian state can stretch from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River.

Most infamous for: rocket attacks into southern Israel.

Hamas started out innocently enough as a humanitarian aid organization and (you won't believe this) was legally registered as such in Israel in 1978! The Israelis apparently reasoned that if Palestinians received better health care, schools, and other civic services, their allegiance would turn away from Yasser Arafat and al-Fatah.

But when the outside world powers pressured Israel to negotiate with Arafat, Hamas was left out in the cold. It became more violent and hostile than Israel had ever expected. Hamas's position is now officially on record as “no solution for the Palestine question except through jihad,” which it pursues to this day.⁹

My wife and I moved into the Gaza Strip in 2006 to open an oasis of calm and love for innocent kindergarten children. We rented a building, found staff to hire, and got off to a good start with sixty students that first school year. But when Hamas won the local election

of June 2007, it drove out the al-Fatah forces and soon came to ransack our building.¹⁰ We had no choice but to shut down.

3. FARC (translates as “Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia”). Annual turnover: \$600 million. Sources: drug processing and trafficking (half the world’s cocaine); kidnapping and ransom; mining of minerals, particularly gold.

Control: about 30 percent of Colombian territory.

Goal: to overthrow capitalism in Colombia and replace it with a Marxist-socialist government.

4. Hezbollah (translates as “Party of Allah”). Annual turnover: \$500 million. Sources: aid mainly from its Shiite friend, Iran; also drug smuggling.

Control: large sections of southern and northeastern Lebanon.

Two goals: to “liberate” Jerusalem and all Palestine, and to turn Lebanon into a Shiite state.

Most infamous for: 1983 truck bombing in Beirut that killed 241 US military (mostly Marines).

5. Taliban (translates as “Students”). Annual turnover: \$400 million. Sources: “protection and support” fees from every stage of the opium trade (source of heroin); donations.

Goal: an Islamic theocracy in Afghanistan, with strict Sharia law in place. (The Taliban had their way from 1996 until 2001, when the US/NATO arrived; they still want to get back in charge.)

Most infamous for: village massacres; strict enforcement of Sharia law, especially on women.

6. Al-Qaeda (translates as “The Foundation” or “The Base”). Also branches such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (northern Africa); al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Yemen). Annual turnover: \$150 million. Sources: Saudi donations; kidnapping and ransom; drug trafficking.

Goal: a unified Islamic front against the West.

Most infamous for: blowing up the two US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998; thereafter, the 9/11 attacks on the United States of America in 2001.

7. Lashkar-e-Taiba (translates as “Army of the Righteous”). Annual turnover: \$100 million. Source: donations.

Goal: to force India to return all of Jammu-Kashmir state back to Pakistani (Muslim) governance . . . and then to overthrow the Indian government.

8. Al-Shabaab (translates as “The Youth”). Annual turnover: \$70 million. Source: ransom from kidnapping; pirating of ships; donations.

Control: holds a number of Somali airports and small seaports.

Goal: To drive all foreigners (including African Union troops) out of Somalia so it can establish an Islamic caliphate.

Most infamous for: dramatic 2013 attack on the upscale Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya.

You might wonder why Africans would have a taste for jihad. Part of the answer is geographic; just look at a map, and you will see that the open water between

Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula is less than two hundred miles across. Most observers call Somalia a “failed state”—in other words, its government struggles to function (and has since the early 1990s; remember *Black Hawk Down?*). Troops from neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia are trying to improve the situation—and al-Shabaab much prefers the current vacuum.

As a result, retaliation raids into eastern Kenya are causing major havoc. Schools are suffering as teachers from other parts of Kenya flee to safer postings.¹¹

9. Real IRA, a split-off from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) that signed a peace agreement with the UK in 1998. Annual turnover: \$50 million. Source: smuggling; illegal trade; donations.

Goal: to get the British out of Northern Ireland altogether.

Most infamous for: hitting the heart of London with rockets and car bombs.

10. Boko Haram (translates as “Western Education Is a Sin”), now rebranded as the Islamic State’s West Africa Province. Annual turnover: \$25 million. Source: kidnapping and ransom; fees and taxes; bank robberies; looting.

Goal: to set up Sharia law across all of Nigeria (which is roughly half Muslim, half Christian), thereby defeating secular/Western influences.

Most infamous for: April 2014 capture of 276 girls at a Chibok boarding school.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of girls as young as eleven have been raped by this group. As one Nigerian

governor told the *New York Times*, “The sect leaders make a very conscious effort to impregnate the women. Some of them, I was told, even pray before mating, offering supplications for God to make the products of what they are doing become children that will inherit their ideology.”¹² Those “products,” of course, are not only children but also infection, the hazards of early childbirth, and a lifetime of stigma to follow.

(You may be wondering why my old group, al-Fatah, is not included here. That is because, following the death of my onetime hero Yasser Arafat in 2004, the new leadership under Mahmoud Abbas has chosen a different strategy: non-violence. In the Palestinian West Bank, the Arab leaders say, in essence, “The day for violence is over. The Israeli military beats us every time anyway. We will keep pressing for our rights, but peacefully.” This kind of approach is winning friends across much of Europe and elsewhere. Even Pope Francis welcomed Abbas to the Vatican in 2015 as “an angel of peace.”¹³)

Similarities and Differences

As can be quickly seen, eight of the ten best-financed terrorist groups carry some kind of tie to Islam. And this will be our focus for the rest of this book, since it is the greatest concern across the West (and also happens to be my personal background).

But it would be a mistake to think that all Muslims think and act alike. The nearly 1.8 *billion* followers of Allah around the world¹⁴ are certainly not uniform—not any more than

the 2.3 billion followers of Christ¹⁵ are. Both faiths are fractured into multiple streams, and both have a wide range of devotional fervor or lack thereof.

Think for a minute about Malala Yousafzai, the sweet Pakistani teenager who survived a Taliban bullet to her head for attending school and who has become a global champion for girls' education, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. Now think of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the fire-breathing mullah who the same year was declared caliph (successor to Muhammad, and therefore supreme authority) of ISIS. They are both Muslims! They both read the Qur'an, go to the mosque on Fridays, recite the standard prayers, and the rest. But they are vastly different individuals.

Not all 1.8 billion followers of Allah think and act alike—no more than all 2.3 billion followers of Christ do.

The biggest segments of Islam—"denominations," if you will—are the Sunnis (more than 80 percent) and the Shiites (less than 20 percent). But they are not evenly spread out. Shiites are the majority in countries such as Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain and have large populations in Lebanon, Pakistan, and India. Sunnis dominate just about everywhere else: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, the Palestinian territories, and the Gulf states of Qatar (where my family still lives) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). You can't say one country is "all this" or "all that," any more than you can flatly declare that "England is Protestant" or "Mexico is Catholic."

This Islamic split is nothing recent. It goes all the way back to the death of Muhammad in AD 632. Who would be

his successor, the next caliph? Most followers said Abu Bakr, Muhammad's close friend and also his father-in-law. They committed themselves to following the Prophet's practice and *sunna* (teachings); hence the name *Sunni*.

But others said no, the new leader should be a *blood* relative of Muhammad. They claimed he had anointed Ali, his cousin (and son-in-law). They called themselves *shiaat Ali* ("partisans of Ali"), from which the name *Shiite* evolved.

The tide ebbed back and forth for nearly fifty years—until Ali's son, Hussein, was beheaded in a battle with Sunni troops in AD 680 in Karbala (modern Iraq). That sealed the split forevermore. To this day, more than 40 percent of Sunnis don't think Shiites are proper Muslims. Shiites aren't terribly fond of Sunnis either.

Tricky Politics

What really muddies the water is when a ruler from a minority somehow rises to power in a given nation. President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, for example, is an Alawite ("follower of Ali"), a branch of the Shiite sect. But the Syrian population is three-fourths Sunni, while Alawites are only 12 percent. No wonder the country imploded into civil war starting in 2011, triggering what many are calling the worst refugee crisis since World War II. Millions of innocent men, women, and children are running for their lives as Assad's army, the rebels who want to overthrow him, and ISIS rip the nation apart.

An opposite example: Saddam Hussein was a Sunni Muslim running all of Iraq, which is two-thirds Shiite (not to mention another 10 percent or more Kurdish). Yet he man-

aged to rule with an iron fist. Since his capture and death at the end of 2006, Shiite presidents have been in control—and struggling not to alienate the minority Sunnis.

ISIS is a Sunni organization through and through. Shiites have no place in the ISIS vision of the future; in fact, they are marked for death. ISIS views itself as the real defender of the Sunni people, unlike most politicians, whom ISIS says can't be counted upon.

When in the fall of 2014 ISIS boldly stormed into Ramadi, a major Iraqi city of half a million people, the world watched in amazement as the government's army melted away like an ice cube in the sun. US and coalition troops who had fought hard for this city back in 2006 were especially dismayed. US Defense Secretary Ash Carter told CNN, "The Iraqi forces just showed no will to fight, [even though] they were not outnumbered. In fact, they vastly outnumbered the opposing force."¹⁶ Why the retreat? In my opinion, it happened because the Sunni soldiers did not have enough tactical support from the Shiite generals back in Baghdad. Shiite leaders had not wanted to give Sunni fighters adequate weapons—which might be turned against *them* some day. So, a house divided against itself could not stand against ISIS.

You may also have heard the terms *Salafi* or *Wahhabi*, which indicate a movement within the Sunni world that emphasizes purity of religion, a literal reading of the Qur'an, and strict adherence to its rules. Salafists are especially active in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. (The name *Wahhabi* refers to the same people but is considered a slur.) ISIS is definitely within the Salafi stream of Sunni Islam.

Much more could be written about the particulars of

Islamic terrorism. But this is enough to set the context. It makes the point that the world has a major challenge on its hands—especially with “lone wolf” young people popping up regularly to terrorize such far-flung sites as the Boston Marathon race, the Canadian Parliament building, and subways from London to Moscow. Uneasiness is everywhere.

What is behind all this? What is the mind-set of those who plant bombs, launch rockets, and chop off heads? Why the passionate hatred? And how may it be defused? To this we now turn our attention.