

## **American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us**

*Steven Emerson*

*New York: Free Press, 2003. 285 pages.*

“Terrorism expert” Steven Emerson has done it again. With his usual exaggerated style and hate-mongering rhetoric, Emerson has painted all Muslims with the same broad brush. While trying to assure his readers at the outset that not all Muslims are terrorists, the bulk of his new book, *American Jihad*, is filled with brazenly over-simplified attacks on the entire Muslim American community. This biased and heavy-handed portrayal of Muslims is characteristic of Emerson’s work – most notably his 1994 PBS video “Jihad in America.” In *American Jihad*, Emerson again presents a terrifying picture of American Muslims as fanatical, violent people lurking and plotting against the United States. It is thus hardly surprising that he has gained a reputation, reminiscent of his friend Daniel Pipes, for advocating grand Islamic conspiracies without any credible evidence.

In a rush to get to press, his latest book is a quick tabloid-style read. The book is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter deals with Emerson’s “discovery” of “militant Muslims” and the subsequent making of his PBS video “Jihad in America.” The next six chapters attempt to uncover the inner working of such groups as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Hamas, and al-Qaida. He also spends one entire chapter on the terrorist infiltration of American academic institutions. Finally, in his concluding chapter, Emerson tries to encourage individuals within the Muslim community to “fight back” against the threat that he feels is facing the country.

The book is large on print and short on analysis. For a decade, Emerson has been issuing dire, over-the-top warnings that Muslims in the United States pose a catastrophic threat to the country, and in this book he

tries to use 9/11 as proof that he was right all along. But the only thing that 9/11 proved was that one particular group outside the United States – al-Qaida – was willing to use violence.

Emerson wants us to believe that all Muslim organizations, think tanks, and charities are a threat, whether inside or outside the country. He further wants us to accept that they are all working together in a massive network of terror: infiltrating US universities, recruiting killers, plotting attacks, and waiting for the signal to rise up against the American government – but provides no evidence to support either claim. In fact, none of the groups and organizations Emerson denounces has ever carried out terrorist attacks against the United States. In addition to presenting no evidence that they intend to do so, he provides no evidence to suggest that such terrorist groups as al-Qaida were welcomed, shielded, or assisted in any way by the American Muslim community.

Finally, nothing in *American Jihad* suggests that any American-based Muslim organization had anything to do with, or prior knowledge of, the 9/11 attacks. This is in line with his earlier accusations and condemnations of an entire community, none of which have ever been proven correct. Recall his claim on CBS News (19 April 1995) that the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing showed “a Middle Eastern trait” because it “was done with the intent to inflict as many casualties as possible.”

One major weakness with *American Jihad* is the author’s refusal to acknowledge the many distinctions between Islamic groups around the world. For example, he asserts that the militant Shi’a group Hizbullah, which is now a major political party with a social services network in Lebanon, poses the same threat to this country as al-Qaida. In addition, all Islamic groups, from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to the Chechen separatists, are coordinating their activities, exploiting American civil liberties, and willing to use terror against the United States to achieve their ultimate goal of world domination. Emerson provides no evidence, except for a few scattered anecdotes, for this irresponsible claim – one that, coming from a “leading terrorism expert,” can be used to justify the ongoing erosion of American civil liberties.

So what is his proof? For this, Emerson draws our attention to the fact that many mainstream Muslim organizations and individuals in the United States raise money, give speeches on behalf of, or otherwise support groups like Hamas, Hizbullah, and Islamic Jihad, which stage horrific attacks against Israel. He then goes on to argue that these groups are not just fighting Israel thousands of miles away – they are plotting attacks

on the United States as well. What Emerson does not do, however, is to provide a single example of Hamas, Hizbullah, or Islamic Jihad carrying out terrorist activities in this country. Since there is no evidence to support his claim, Emerson falls back on conjecture, asserting that Hamas and Hizbullah have established links with al-Qaida and are now ready to turn their formidable apparatus against American targets.

Emerson fails to distinguish between mere rhetoric and actual participation in terrorism, and is unable or unwilling to acknowledge the political dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. His hatred of Muslims is purely a political agenda to demonize any passionate support of the Palestinian cause, hoping thereby to label all Muslims as “terrorists.”

Unfortunately, Emerson uses the word “terrorist” today the way Sen. Joseph McCarthy used the word “communist” in the 1950s. Emerson attempts to discredit the legitimacy of CAIR, one of the country’s largest Muslim-American groups and one that has been welcomed into the White House in recent years, by stating that they “co-sponsored an incendiary rally” that featured “anti-Jewish rhetoric.” This statement is a bit laughable, considering his own vile anti-Islamic rhetoric. Time and again *American Jihad’s* “proof” of terrorist ties is based on newspaper clippings, hearsay, and “incendiary comments.” It is clear that after a decade of sleuthing, Emerson can neither document nor provide any real evidence to suggest that American Muslims are involved in violent “terrorist” activities.

If there really are individuals or groups that pose a threat to the United States – whether they swear their allegiance to Islam, Christianity, Israel, Northern Ireland, or white supremacy groups – law enforcement should take whatever steps necessary to stop them. But Emerson is exceedingly inadequate as a guide in this field, which requires skilled analysis and an appreciation of complexities. Emerson, whose obsessive and sledgehammer-like approach often makes his reporting appear to be an afterthought to his conclusion, possesses neither. The sensational but poorly reasoned *American Jihad* will do nothing to enhance his stature among serious scholars.

The truth is that Emerson’s view of Muslim Americans as violent terrorists all plotting to destroy the United States simply creates confusion and hatred rather than any clear understanding of the community. The book is definitely not worth purchasing.

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