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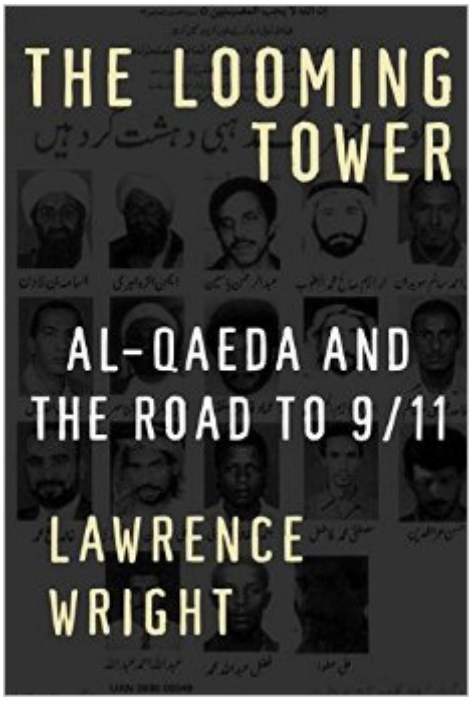
# The Looming Tower

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## Synopsis

UPDATED AND WITH A NEW AFTERWORDNational Book Award FinalistA Time, Newsweek, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, and New York Times Book Review Best Book of the YearA gripping narrative that spans five decades, The Looming Tower explains in unprecedented detail the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, the rise of al-Qaeda, and the intelligence failures that culminated in the attacks on the World Trade Center. Lawrence Wright re-creates firsthand the transformation of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri from incompetent and idealistic soldiers in Afghanistan to leaders of the most successful terrorist group in history. He follows FBI counterterrorism chief John Oâ ™Neill as he uncovers the emerging danger from al-Qaeda in the 1990s and struggles to track this new threat. Packed with new information and a deep historical perspective, The Looming Tower is the definitive history of the long road to September 11.From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Lawrence Wright has written an utterly absorbing book that will both captivate and appall you, and

not just because of his recounting of the breathtaking horrors that took place on September 11, 2001. Equally appalling is Wright's depiction of the entrenched bureaucrats at the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency, who failed to share crucial information with one another because of petty personal differences and agency cultures that value conformity above true investigative ability. Had the CIA, in particular, released information regarding the whereabouts of several individuals who ultimately participated in the 9-11 attacks, those tragedies might well have been prevented.Reading these things was deeply painful for me, who watched the Trade Towers collapse as I sped across Queens trying to get home to my family in Brooklyn Heights. I can only imagine how distressing this experience might be to those who lost friends and loved ones in the attacks that day. Yet Wright has handled this difficult material in a way that makes it bearable to read, and his pacing of the story is masterful. The Looming Tower reads like a suspense novel at times and the writing is lyrical.The book is also chock full of pertinent facts and background material that help make sense, insofar as that is even possible, of the motivations of the terrorists. I have never seen logic in the tactics of al Qaeda and similar groups, but this book has helped me understand that logic is not the driving force. Rather it seems to be history, the pursuit of a tribal conception of "honor" and a desire to recreate past glory that is far more important than logic.

In Lawrence Wright's masterpiece The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, he effortlessly connects disparate puzzle pieces of our current clash with Islamofascism with a coherent, page-turning narrative that at time reads like a Robert Ludlum suspense novel. He begins with FBI operative Dan Coleman who finds terrifying evidence in 1996 that there is an organization, Al-Qaeda, that is hell-bent on destroying America and spreading Islamofascism throughout the world. His superiors find Coleman's claims "too bizarre, too primitive and exotic" and fail to take action. In other words, the Western imagination cannot comprehend the Islamofascist mentality. It is Wright's objective to get inside, to the very core, of Al-Qaeda's chief figures and show us how they feel humiliated by the successes of the West, including Israel, and how this humiliation, plus a great deal of sexual repression, animates their obsession with becoming "martyrs for Allah." Lawrence Wright achieves his objective masterfully and leaves a terrifying, indelible imprint on the reader. Having read dozens of "9/11" books, I can say this is my favorite. The book succeeds for several reasons. First, it shows the failure of American imagination in dealing with terrorism. Second, Wright's narratives leading to 9/11 are effortlessly woven with concrete (never academic) psychological profiles of the seeds of Al-Qaeda: We see the fastidious, sexually repressed Egyptian anti-Semite religious scholar Sayyid Qutb as he navigates post World War II America. He is

disgusted by our freedom and equality for women and his disgust radicalizes him so that he returns to Egypt to support a radical theocracy movement that thrives to this day.

I saw the author last night at a book signing/lecture, and wrote down some of his main points. I hope it is o.k. with him that I share them here, and what he said, because I found if very fascinating. Mr. Wright is a very intelligent, "gentle" man who obviously cares about things and people, and I found him very likeable, becuase he has a good sense of humor and he did so much research for this book, and travelled extensively. He said he interviewed over 1,000 people in the Arab world for this book.Some of the main points of what he said:- The Arabic world is incredibly insular. He said, if you take away oil, the entire Arab world, from Morocco to Pakistan, produces less economically than the Finnish company Nokia (Nokia has less than 8,000 employees). He said, there have been 10,000 books ever translated into Arabic. If you think about that in terms of how many rows of book stacks that would be at a bookstore, it is shocking (I calculate that to be a few stacks of books !). One single Borders in the U.S. thus contains far more books than have ever been translated by Arabic translators (Spain alone translates about 10,000 books a year). Thus, most Arabs are, for our standards, incredibly lacking in resources, to understand our world. Not only that, but their countries censor books and all media. Freedom to assemble basically does not exist in the Arab world, and thus, basic freedoms are lacking.- There is "gender apartheid" in [most of] the Arab world (particularly Saudi Arabia). Women are mostly not seen in public in Saudi Arabia. Men know very little about women as a result (how to meet them ?). It is pathetic, how little young men know about women.

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