



The Hunt for KSM: Inside the Pursuit and Takedown of the Real 9/11 Mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

Terry McDermott , Josh Meyer

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The definitive account of the decade-long pursuit and capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the terrorist mastermind of 9/11

Only minutes after United 175 plowed into the World Trade Center's South Tower, people in positions of power correctly suspected who was behind the assault: Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. But it would be 18 months after September 11 before investigators would capture the actual mastermind of the attacks, the man behind bin Laden himself.

That monster is the man who got his hands dirty while Osama fled; the man who was responsible for setting up Al Qaeda's global networks, who personally identified and trained its terrorists, and who personally flew bomb parts on commercial airlines to test their invisibility. That man withstood waterboarding and years of other intense interrogations, not only denying Osama's whereabouts but making a literal game of the proceedings, after leading his pursuers across the globe and back. That man is Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and he is still, to this day, the most significant Al Qaeda terrorist in captivity.

In THE HUNT FOR KSM, Terry McDermott and Josh Meyer go deep inside the US government's dogged but flawed pursuit of this elusive and dangerous man. One pair of agents chased him through countless false leads and narrow escapes for five years before 9/11. And now, drawing on a decade of investigative reporting and unprecedented access to hundreds of key sources, many of whom have never spoken publicly—as well as jihadis and members of KSM's family and support network—this is a heart-pounding trip inside the dangerous, classified world of counterterrorism and espionage.

The Hunt for KSM: Inside the Pursuit and Takedown of the Real 9/11 Mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed Details

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From Reader Review The Hunt for KSM: Inside the Pursuit and Takedown of the Real 9/11 Mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed for online ebook

Keith Johnson says

I won this book in a Goodreads First Reads giveaways contest and I'm glad I did. This book is an exhaustive account for the search for KSM. The book reads like a novel and I learned so many facts about the KSM search investigation. The writers must have done hundreds or thousands of interviews and poured over countless reports in order to compile this book. I applaud them for that. The story is interesting and a fairly quick read if you are interested in learning about terrorism and our national security. The story is well-written and I found it amazing, with the amount of facts involved, that they were able to keep the book in chronological order.

I did enjoy it, as noted by my 4-star rating. The first half of the book is very good and I read it quickly. Now, that being said, I am somewhat torn over this book. I don't like to focus only on the negative side of books but there is one glaring theme throughout the second half of the book. The second half, although very interesting, turns into an attack on the CIA. I have no doubt that the CIA made numerous mistakes in their pre- and post-9/11 investigations. But so did every agency. The fragmentation of the agencies led to numerous failures, and the mistakes by the CIA/FBI etc are no different. Reading the book, I got the feeling the writers received much more participation from the FBI than from the CIA. This is just the nature of the organizations. The CIA is very secretive, and for good reason. I don't blame the authors for writing what they learned from who decided to report to them. However, the book seems to blame the CIA for all the failures. Having served in the Army and as a member of the intelligence community, I had the privilege to work with many of the agencies. There are good people in all agencies, and there are hotheads in all as well. I would have given this book 5 stars had they not focused so much on the failures by the CIA.

But overall I would highly recommend this book. I look forward to reading "Perfect Soldiers Perfect Soldiers: The Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It" by Terry McDermott and any future works by Josh Meyers.

Rusty Fischer says

I won this book for a Goodreads Giveaway and was really happy to have won it! I found this book exceedingly well-researched and almost exhaustive in detail. To read it is to submerge yourself in every detail of "The Hunt for KSM," not just on the ground in uniform but from the very beginning of his prominence of a main objective in both FBI and CIA headquarters. It's a multilayered and complex journey and I honestly salute the authors for going to such lengths to provide an objective and clear-cut narrative to what was clearly a complex, multi-faceted, multi-agency investigation.

Gaby says

The Hunt for KSM gives us a chronological, detailed, and carefully researched account of the investigation

into the characters that planned, financed, and executed the 9/11 attacks. McDermott and Meyer give us anecdotes, conversations, and small details that must have come from extensive interviews. The authors are quick to give credit to individual investigators and are not afraid to mention mistakes and lost opportunities when discussing earlier attempts to pinpoint the planners and actors in the terrorist attacks.

For those of us who are not familiar with the main characters, geography or the politics of the region, the details can be confusing. Fortunately, the writers are careful to repeat the names and to make the story accessible and comprehensible to the lay person.

The discussion differentiating the CIA and the FBI was particularly interesting as the authors explained why and how the CIA became the prime mover in the fight against terror. In the detailed description of the investigations, I learned that so many seemingly disparate events that were going on around me, whether in the Philippines or in the US, were significant. There are detailed accounts of KSM and his colleagues escapades in the Philippines - and the investigators' reconstruction of KSM's trail - that involve bar girls, an apartment in Greenhills, pretty dentists, and visits into the slums of Manila - that I personally found fascinating.

Overall, *The Hunt for KSM* is an engrossing read. It teaches us about geopolitics and current events and gives us greater insight into the debate about torture, civil rights versus emergency measures and national security. Not all the US characters are heroes, but we certainly appreciate the dedication and sacrifices of the American and Pakistani investigators.

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Review copy courtesy of the publisher.

Jenny.p says

Incredibly well done. Solid research that is a total page turner and reads like a thriller. A timely study that fills a big gap in scholarship and is totally recommended for any one who has an interest in following the KSM trials and piecing together the story of who is the man who masterminded the 9/11 plot.

Mitchell says

First, I'm required to note that I won this book in Goodreads' First Reads giveaway. Second, this was a great book. Much in the same vein of "Triple Agent", which I read a while ago, this is a very in depth look at Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks. This book cataloged KSM's life, his education in the US, joining the fight in Afghanistan against the Soviets, and his subsequent activities efforts to terrorize America and Israel. I don't think that I realized what a big deal this guy was, and it's worrying how little US intelligence and FBI knew about him as well, until he was implicated as planning 9/11. This book also spent a good amount of time describing the counter-terrorism efforts of the CIA and FBI post 9/11, contrasting the different styles of both departments and how both approaches could be effective or not. Very good book if for everyone who'd like a better understanding of Islamic terrorism and the War on Terror.

Jerome says

I've read only fragmentary accounts of the takedown of KSM (Bergen, Tenet, Suskind, Risen, Rashid) so I'm glad I finally managed to read this.

"The Hunt for KSM" gives us a chronological, detailed, and carefully researched account of the investigation into the characters that planned, financed, and executed the 9/11 attacks. McDermott and Meyer give us anecdotes, conversations, and small details that must have come from extensive interviews. The authors are quick to give credit to individual investigators and are not afraid to mention mistakes and lost opportunities when discussing earlier attempts to pinpoint the planners and actors in the terrorist attacks.

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Overall, The Hunt for KSM is a fascinating, engaging, and thrilling read. It teaches us about geopolitics and current events and gives us greater insight into the debate about torture, civil rights versus emergency measures and national security. Not all the US characters are heroes, but we certainly appreciate the dedication and sacrifices of the American and Pakistani investigators.

Chris says

Great book. Reads like a Tom Clancy novel. Interesting insight on the 9/11 attacks, and how they may have been prevented. Very interesting on how our government does and does not work. Based on the point of view of the FBI. I am guessing CIA team did not cooperate for the book as much as the FBI.

Michael says

[http://philadelphiareviewofbooks.com/...](http://philadelphiareviewofbooks.com/)

If public discourse is any measure, as a nation we've become comfortable with the idea that the national security apparatus is working. To what extent it's working, is less agreed upon. But fewer and fewer of us are disputing the contention that if the men and women who serve protecting our interests abroad and American lives at home were not doing what they're doing, we would all be considerably less safe. This is not to say there are no voices of dissent. In May, Harper's Magazine ran an article in the Readings section called "Eye of the Drone," a series of statements from the families of victims and survivors of a March 17, 2011, drone attack in the village of Datta Khel in the Pakistani region of North Waziristan. The collateral

damage of counterterrorism, counterinsurgency's small-footed brother, is still devastating.

"The tribal elders who had been killed could not be identified because there were body parts strewn about. The smell was awful. I just collected the pieces of flesh that I believed belonged to my father and placed them in a small coffin."

"The mothers and wives plead with the men not to congregate together. They do not want to lose any more of their husbands, sons, brothers, and nephews. People in the same family now sleep apart because they do not want their togetherness to be viewed suspiciously through the eye of the drone. They do not want to become the next target."

Whether capturing the bad guys is worth this innocent blood on our collective hands is not clear, but there's no doubt we are capturing (or killing) the bad guys. However, two important narratives concerning the methods we use to capture and interrogate said villains are emerging as the national security and anti-terrorism community loosens its lips to the media, and the publishing world, about the last ten years of its operations. These two positions pit the FBI against the CIA, a rivalry as old as the institutions themselves. In the media, Ali Soufan and Jose Rodriguez, two men with firsthand experience of opposite sides of this coin, have brought interesting new facts to light regarding the treatment of suspected terrorists at the hands of U.S. interrogators. Both men are affirmed patriots. They are less concerned with the moral implications of the way they treat prisoners than they are with the efficacy of their methods. They say they will do anything to save American lives.

By what methods do we get information from a hardened criminal, when that information may stop a terrorist attack on our interests abroad or on our people at home? Should the nature of the information sought, or the attitude of the suspect, change those methods? Soufan and Rodriguez think they know the answers to these questions and they don't agree.

Jose A. Rodriguez Jr. thrust himself into the spotlight recently upon the publication of a memoir of his career in intelligence. That book, *Hard Measures: How Aggressive CIA Actions After 9/11 Saved American Lives*, particularly its description of the destruction of tapes showing the torture of Abu Zubaydah, was the subject of a controversial 60 Minutes interview in April. In the interview, Rodriguez claims he destroyed the tapes to erase any ugly images which might incite violence toward his fellow officers and other Americans. He never questions the moral implications of the behavior shown in the footage. In fact, Rodriguez goes so far as to claim the enhanced interrogation methods used by the CIA, particularly in the case of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was only identified as the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks after Zubaydah's arrest, helped thwart numerous terrorist attacks. Lesley Stahl, the 60 Minutes interviewer, never directly confronts Rodriguez on his use of torture. She tiptoes around the issue, though President Obama has identified the use of enhanced interrogation as torture for years.

"So you were getting pressure from Congress and the White House to take the gloves off. Did you go to the dark side?"

"We are the dark side."

"But I mean, these were enhanced interrogation techniques. Other people call it torture. This was– this wasn't benign in any– any sense of the word."

"I'm not trying to say that they were benign. But the problem here is that people don't understand that this program was not about hurting anybody. This program was about instilling a sense of hopelessness and

despair on the terrorist, on the detainee, so that he would conclude on his own that he was better off cooperating with us.”

Dana Priest, a reporter for the Washington Post, described Rodriguez as “a big-city police detective stuffed uncomfortably into a tailored suit” with the ruddy complexion and walrus mustache to match, when she met him in 2005 while he was still an undercover boss at the CIA. He’s a bit of a cowboy, a Latin George W. Bush. In his memoir, undercover in Latin America, he woos a dictatorial warlord with his horseback riding prowess, befriends Manuel Noriega’s witch doctor, and runs straight to the office on 9/11, ready to take on America’s newly confirmed enemy number one. Though this all sounds like the stuff of spy thrillers, Rodriguez’s James Bond is always filtered through the lens of Will Ferrell, a ready-made parody of itself, full of stifled laughter.

In response to the president labeling his agency’s practices as torture, Rodriguez says, “When President Obama condemns the covert action activities of a previous government, he is breaking the covenant that exists between intelligence officers who are at the pointy end of the spear, hanging way out there, and the government that authorized them and directed them to go there.” Rodriguez’s loyalty to the agency, and his fellow agents, trumps his loyalty to his country. Moral ambiguity does not exist in this worldview.

What Rodriguez fails to address is the fact that the information leading to the arrest of KSM, as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is known, was extracted from Zubaydah under the FBI’s routine interrogation procedures. Ali Soufan, along with his partner, Steve Gaudin, interrogated Zubaydah when he was captured in Pakistan in March 2002. The CIA already had the mandate from the Bush Administration to head up all investigations of terrorist activity in the world of radical Islam, but was still pulling itself together for a task not practiced much in its illustrious history – namely the collection of actionable intelligence from captive enemies of the United States.

The “sense of hopelessness and despair” Rodriguez hoped to evoke in a detainee so he “would conclude on his own that he was better off cooperating with us” turned out to inspire detainees to provide false information. In his recent *Frontline* interview, Soufan reflects on how information obtained through enhanced interrogation and passed up through the intelligence community to the White House, fueled Colin Powell’s argument that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. The Iraq War was predicated on false leads procured through torture. This much we know.

Terry McDermott and Josh Meyer’s new book, *The Hunt for KSM: Inside the Pursuit and Takedown of the Real 9/11 Mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed*, opens with a description of Abu Zubaydah’s apprehension and interrogation. Ali Soufan, a young FBI agent who’d become familiar with the big shots and the bit players of violent jihad in his years working the anti-terrorism beat, and his partner Steve Gaudin, fly from the U.S. to Pakistan, where Zubaydah has been apprehended. In the boondoggle of intelligence bureaucracy after 9/11, they don’t even know who the other people on the government-chartered jet are or why so many people would be accompanying them. When they reach Zubaydah, critically wounded in his capture, this becomes clear. The other passengers are medical professionals who spend hours stabilizing Zubaydah’s condition.

When a CIA agent asks Soufan why he is not interrogating Zubaydah, Soufan tells him he thought he was being brought in only as support for the CIA’s interrogators. This is not so. Soufan and Gaudin get to work on Zubaydah alone, with frequent pauses for the doctors to see to his wounds.

No enhanced interrogation techniques are used. Soufan and Gaudin open by calling Zubaydah a pet name only his mother uses. They show him pictures of men they know well by reputation and convince him they

are legitimate experts and will know when he is lying. Gaudin holds Zubaydah's hand while he slides into an MRI machine. They gain his trust, and he talks.

It is in these casual, conversational interrogations that Zubaydah reveals the identity of the mastermind behind the attacks of 9/11. Ali Soufan, unlike Jose Rodriguez, is an expert on al-Qaeda. Before 2001, he was one of the few agents working in the U.S. anti-terrorism community to speak Arabic. In his new book, *The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9/11 and the War Against al-Qaeda*, Soufan describes his years of experience, the methods and organization of the men who developed and carried out terror plots around the world. He knows his stuff.

In his *Frontline* interview with Martin Smith, Soufan refers to the actionable intelligence he acquired through standard interrogation protocol and to the false leads secured through enhanced techniques. He says "heck" a lot, and "freaking" at least twice. He's as unpolished as Rodriguez, but much more specific in his narrative, and a whole lot younger.

"You compare interrogating somebody [to] dating."

"Sometimes it is, because it's about building a rapport with an individual. It's about building the chemistry. It's about building a trust, a little bit, because if he's going to tell you something, he needs to have some sense of trust about you."

Some people might cringe at the thought of building chemistry with terrorists. These men don't deserve to be courted. True. But if courting them provides better information than waterboarding them, Soufan argues, we ought to play nice.

While Soufan's assertion that he could have prevented 9/11 if the CIA hadn't interfered with an earlier operation is questionable, McDermott and Meyer's book supports the idea that Soufan, along with FBI agent Frank Pellegrino and Port Authority officer Matt Besheer, were the best prepared to investigate and interrogate those responsible for 9/11.

While the divergence of the FBI and CIA in post-9/11 anti-terrorism operations is at the heart of *The Hunt for KSM*, McDermott and Meyer reveal how some of the most notorious terrorists in the world eluded justice despite all odds. Ramzi Yousef, KSM's nephew, sleeps in for a few hours the day he bombs the World Trade Center in 1993, and his inept partners let him sleep. In the Phillipines, later in the 90s, Yousef and KSM live more like lowlife criminals – bunking with exotic dancers and eating takeout burgers – than ascetic, religious political actors. Yousef's charisma shows through in his defense of himself in court, in which he calls himself "my client." His closing statement, despite its violent notions, rings true in some ways.

Much of this narrative is cinematic, such as when Pellegrino and Besheer "oreo" Khalifa, an important link to KSM. Pellegrino, dressed in baggy sweats, and Besheer, in dapper pressed suits, record every word Khalifa speaks in his hotel rooms, from stakeouts in both the room above and below Khalifa's. You can see the cutaway hotel like a dollhouse. Tom McHale, an NYPD officer who worked with the Joint Terrorism Task Force in Pakistan, arrests suspects with handcuffs that take on the power of a religious talisman. The cuffs imbue the operation of counterterrorism with a uniting importance. When the cuffs are lost, the Pakistanis working with the JTTF are devastated. Their return to McHale's hands is a sign of the role of fate in fighting terrorism. Karachi, the cinematic equivalent of the Wild West, with its dusty streets, rampant crime and endless hiding places, provides KSM, the wiliest of outlaws with a perfect backdrop for his evil escapades.

While KSM's back story is given its fair share of attention, McDermott and Meyer put the hunters in the spotlight, showing the struggles of Pellegrino and Besheer in getting sufficient attention and resources allotted to their investigations. The sense of lost opportunity hits close to home, as anti-terrorism pre-9/11 is repeatedly described as a backwater in the FBI, CIA, and NYPD. The few agents willing to embrace the post, which others considered a career dead end, fought hard to make the bureaucracy understand the importance of thwarting men like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Osama Bin Laden before they struck again. If Soufan is right, the FBI could've changed the course of history.

In the end McDermott and Meyer's narrative in *The Hunt for KSM* comes back to the methodology of anti-terrorism post-9/11. The structural and institutional incompatibility between the FBI, a prosecutorial organization, and the CIA, a preventative organization, makes the investigation of terrorism slipshod at best. The false information KSM supplies to the CIA under enhanced interrogation, shows the inefficiency, not to speak of the immorality of torture. President Obama has given an unofficial pardon to those who broke the Geneva Conventions and tortured America's captive enemies, saying the U.S. will not prosecute torturers who were acting under duress from the CIA and the Bush Administration. Jose Rodriguez might have mentioned this in his *60 Minutes* interview. Instead he cited Obama's identification of enhanced interrogation as torture as an endangerment of his fellow agents and the American public, by extension. The failure to prosecute, however, may end up being not only a source of America's moral fallibility, but also a real incentive for further attacks. But the way Rodriguez and Soufan frame their respective arguments, we may never know.

Chris says

Terrific followup to *Perfect Soldiers*. It doesn't put you in the head of KSM like Peter Bergen's *The Osama Bin Laden I Know* did with bin Laden. However it does give you a better understanding of the man behind 9/11 and how those attacks, though certainly the most devastating he devised, were just one of many that originated from KSM over more than a decade of terrorist activity. Interesting, too, to learn about his relationship with bin Laden and to find out more about KSM's time as a college student in North Carolina.

Natalya says

I won this book in a Goodreads First-Reads giveaway.

This is an incredibly detailed narrative, from the United States intelligence viewpoint, of the investigation and eventual capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. What I most valued about the book were the insights into the FBI, CIA, and other intelligence teams which were involved in the manhunt and in the investigation of extremist Islam jihad movements and terrorism. It was thrilling (if saddening) to be taken inside a world that not only didn't understand terrorism, but also completely underestimated the threat it posed, knowing what we know today. Suffice it to say my respect for the FBI has grown (at least in some important regards), and for the CIA has retracted (somewhat greatly), as a result of both the character profiles and the general depiction of how the agencies work illustrated in the book.

The Hunt for KSM is obviously meticulously researched - I often felt the impulse to follow the footnotes and figure out how the hell they were able to come by certain pieces of information. An astounding amount of sources and detail went into making this book the authority on the American pursuit of the 9/11 mastermind.

I really appreciated learning a lot about the fight against terrorism with this book. However, it left me hungry for something deeper. While this book certainly exposes egregious flaws in our intelligence apparatus, most significantly with regard to the first three years of interrogation of KSM (which was apparently outsourced to morally delinquent and utterly incompetent contractors), it falls short of outright denouncing the failures of the government. It's not explicit enough in its criticism. It's straight reporting (which is what the authors do); it's not an editorial. And this felt unsatisfactory at times. Secondly, it was really frustrating to read about terrorists lives in detail without any commentary on or insight into their psyches. It too is unsatisfying to read about so disturbing a phenomenon from an objective viewpoint.

The above comments are not criticism, because they go beyond the scope of the book. But I think my next terrorism book will be a nice bold novel.

Kayes Ahmed says

Good book

Maybe because I am reading it a late stage all of the things seemed faster. This book suffers from the same thing that most Western narratives suffer, lack of perspective of the other side. Nevertheless, this is really good book and shows the folly of just throwing money at a problem.

Haitham Ali says

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Gary Warth says

It's refreshing to read an unbiased book on 9/11 that's about facts and not speculation. McDermott and Meyer do a fine job of providing intricate details about government agencies while also telling the story of the human who make up those agencies. People should know KSM as well as Osama bin Laden, but they also should know Frank Pellegrino, Matthew Besheer, Jennifer Keenan and other unsung heroes who tracked down some of the most dangerous terrorist in the world.

But this book also shows plenty of examples of missteps, and again confirms that the CIA's method of "enhanced interrogation" doesn't get the same results as the tried and true, and legal, methods of the FBI. Surprising revelations in the book include the fact that KSM was not originally a member of Al Qaeda, but more of a freelancer who was funded by the group. It was also interesting to see how relatively small KSM's network was. It took two years to get the 19 hijackers into the US and trained, and that was about the extent of his force at the time. Also surprising to see that he had his hands in so many things, including the shoe bomber Richard Reid and the would-be dirty bomber Jose Padilla. KSM also personally killed Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl.

Alex Linschoten says

Incredibly disappointing.

I learnt almost nothing new from reading the book.

I still have no idea about KSM. I only seem to have learned about what kinds of beer his FBI investigators liked to drink, or what music they listened to when they were working out, and these kinds of details.

The authors seem to take it as a given that Mohammad was a 'terrorist' and that this label explains everything that he worked towards. The book offers no real explanation of his behaviour, no sense of his inner life, and no sense of having understood what made him tick. Certainly, I was no wiser having read this book.

Save your money. Don't buy this book.

Caroline says

This book was extremely well-written, in my opinion. It drew me in with its narrative techniques but also provided a ton of real information about such a fascinating time period. McDermott is a very talented writer and I will definitely read whatever he publishes next!
