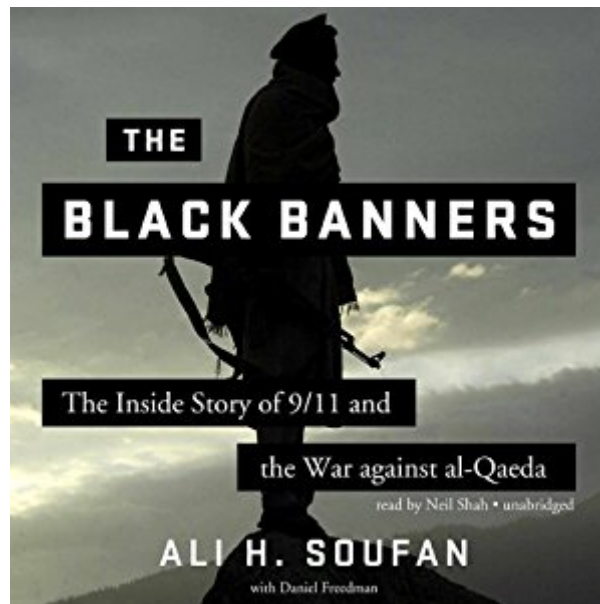


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The Black Banners: The Inside Story Of 9/11 And The War Against AlQaeda



Synopsis

A book that will change the way we think about alQaeda, intelligence, and the events that forever changed America. On September 12, 2001, FBI Special Agent Ali H. Soufan was handed a secret file. Had he received it months earlier-when it was requested-the attacks on New York and Washington could have been prevented. During his time on the front lines, Soufan helped thwart plots around the world and elicited some of the most important confessions from terrorists in the war against alQaeda-without laying so much as a hand on them. Most of these stories have never been reported before and never by anyone with such intimate firsthand knowledge. This narrative account of America's successes and failures against alQaeda is essential to an understanding of the terrorist group. We are taken into hideouts and interrogation rooms. We have a ringside seat at bin Laden's personal celebration of the 9/11 bombings. Such riveting details show us not only how terrorists think and operate but also how they can be beaten and brought to justice.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 19 hours and 33 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: December 8, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B006JS1QMI

Best Sellers Rank: #180 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Politics & Current Events > Freedom & Security #351 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Intelligence & Espionage #413 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Terrorism

Customer Reviews

I've made it a point to never pen a review immediately after finishing a book. I do this because, as a critic, I don't want to feel as if I'm unintentionally overrating or underrating any author's effort. I try to let the work sink in a bit, to have it seep through all the corners of my brain, to soak it across all my consciousness. I do this in hopes that I'll give a more cogent, a more salient, and a more respectful analysis of the work. The longer I allowed Ali Soufan's "The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9/11

and the War Against al-Qaeda" to float around in my head, the more frustrated I grew ... frustrated with the tale ... frustrated with the participants ... and even frustrated a bit with the author. For starters, it's a tremendous and personal work. Clocking in at just over 600 pages, it's a wealth of history about al-Qaida and the terrorist organization's various major (and a few minor) players. And, as Mr. Soufan repeatedly suggests to those around him, "it all starts back in 1979 when ..." He provides outstanding context for the background, and he allows the story to build reasonably from there. Consequently, the book is a comprehensive accounting of names, dates, and places, and, no doubt, it's penned by one committed and impressive mind that have synthesized a vast canvass of data into the effective conclusions that our narrator does. In his bid to tell the definitive insider's story of 9/11, Mr. Soufan clearly is the best-educated, best-prepared, and best-suited to enlighten all of us with where the mindset of such an act began, and the first half of his book goes to great pains to bring the reader up-to-speed on how a few decades of history climaxed with that seminal moment: the destruction of the two World Trade Center towers.

I was floored by *The Black Banners*. While it's a slow read due to the density of information packed in its nearly 600 pages, the content inside is remarkable. It clearly spells out the history of Al Qaeda and the evolution of events leading up to September 11th, and the resulting effects on US intelligence gathering, told from the inside perspective of a "true insider". Ali Soufan's role in hunting down these terrorists was pivotal to so much of the information that we've all heard on the news and that shaped U.S. policy in such a material way. To hear the source of so much of the information that informed U.S. foreign policy for the past 10 years describe it from inside is a precious gift. We owe a debt to Soufan for his brave service to our country, and for sharing it so directly through this book. The book recounts the events that Soufan experienced over this time at the FBI, including his leadership of the USS Cole Bombing investigation, finding out that the CIA deliberately withheld critical information on the Sept 11 hijackers that could very well have prevented the event, the Bush administration deliberately withholding Al Qaeda's connection to the Cole bombing, and its pressure on the FBI to connect Iraq to Sept 11 despite all evidence pointing to the contrary. He also speaks out strongly against the enhanced interrogation techniques in the post-Sept 11 world, citing his experience as an unwilling participant in the very first of these interrogations, and his active efforts to stop them. What struck me most as I read it was that Al Qaeda was a 400 person organization at the time of Sept 11th, and most of the resources of the group went to support services to mask the terrorist operations.

As someone who has studied similar events for much of the same time and subject as Ali Soufan, I must say his analysis is first rate. He has a great understanding of the world of Al-Qaeda and the threats it represents not just to the U.S., but to the entire world. I see many of the reviews mention the redactions present in the book, and I have to say, while I find them annoying, I don't think they take away from the overall meaning of what he wanted to get across in the book. They tend to be omissions to keep either important secrets secret or embarrassing tidbits. The first, is none of my business and the second can probably be figured out by conjecture. In either case, there are ways around it. I find that when people leave large, redacted parts in a book, they are trying to cast a conspiratorial air around the book, giving it an added unimportant gravitas. The reader automatically thinks, well what am I missing? The damn government censoring again! While Mr. Soufan's war stories are actually quite interesting and thrilling in some cases, better than a movie, I would have preferred more on the nature of Al-Qaeda and the threat it presents. The first 40 pages of this book are worth the price of admission because of the fascinating history of the organization and its justifications for its existence. I would like to have seen more of this, since he appears to have been right in the middle of the whole battle. This is why I gave the book three stars instead of four. It is an excellent book, however, covering most of the battle with Al-Qaeda from the first bombing of the World Trade Center, to the Embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya, to the bombing of the USS Cole, to 9/11 and everything since.

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