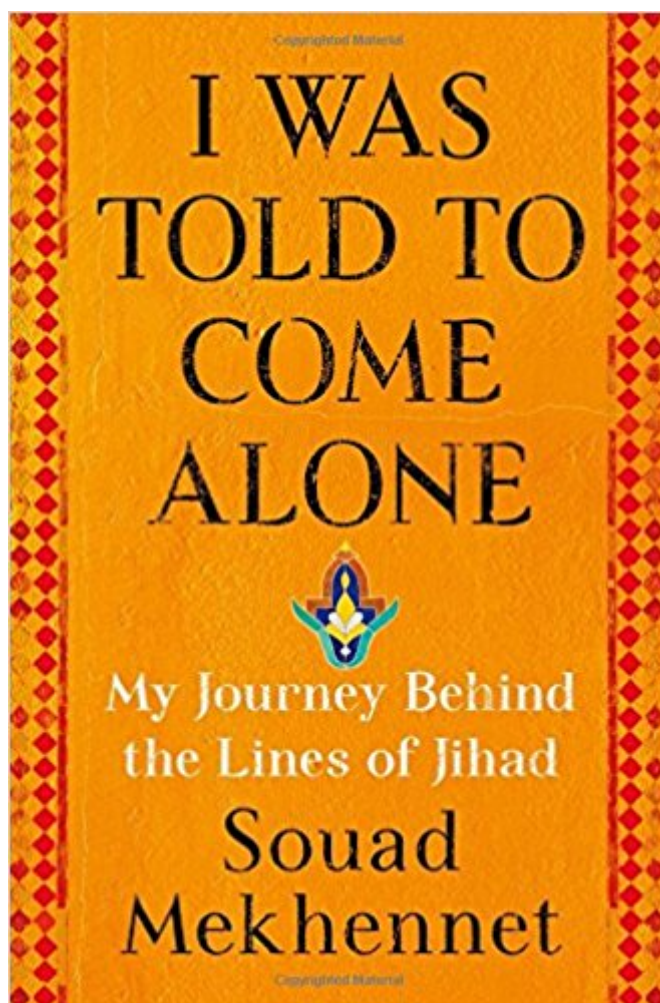


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# I Was Told To Come Alone: My Journey Behind The Lines Of Jihad



## Synopsis

“I was told to come alone. I was not to carry any identification, and would have to leave my cell phone, audio recorder, watch, and purse at my hotel. . . .” For her whole life, Souad Mekhennet, a reporter for The Washington Post who was born and educated in Germany, has had to balance the two sides of her upbringing — Muslim and Western. She has also sought to provide a mediating voice between these cultures, which too often misunderstand each other. In this compelling and evocative memoir, we accompany Mekhennet as she journeys behind the lines of jihad, starting in the German neighborhoods where the 9/11 plotters were radicalized and the Iraqi neighborhoods where Sunnis and Shia turned against one another, and culminating on the Turkish/Syrian border region where ISIS is a daily presence. In her travels across the Middle East and North Africa, she documents her chilling run-ins with various intelligence services and shows why the Arab Spring never lived up to its promise. She then returns to Europe, first in London, where she uncovers the identity of the notorious ISIS executioner — Jihadi John, — and then in France, Belgium, and her native Germany, where terror has come to the heart of Western civilization. Mekhennet’s background has given her unique access to some of the world’s most wanted men, who generally refuse to speak to Western journalists. She is not afraid to face personal danger to reach out to individuals in the inner circles of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, ISIS, and their affiliates; when she is told to come alone to an interview, she never knows what awaits at her destination. Souad Mekhennet is an ideal guide to introduce us to the human beings behind the ominous headlines, as she shares her transformative journey with us. Hers is a story you will not soon forget.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Washington Post Bestseller and Publishers Weekly Best Summer Book of 2017 "An enthralling and sometimes shocking blend of reportage and memoir from the centers of jihadi networks in the Middle East and North Africa. . . . Mekhennet has a singular perspective on the modern crisis of terrorist violence, intimate and constantly questioning." •The New Yorker "A work of significant merit.... One could hardly imagine a more suited writer.... [Mekhennet] is, first and foremost, a brave, resourceful, canny and tireless reporter." •The Washington Post "Much more than a book of journalism, admirable as hers is: it is a remarkable record of a Muslim woman struggling to understand those who kill in the name of her religion, and to explain their actions to the uncomprehending Western world to which she belongs. . . . There is much wisdom in her observations." •The Economist "Compelling and evocative.... a mediating voice between...cultures, which too often misunderstand each other." •Chicago Review of Books "Souad Mekhennet delivers a brilliant narrative of risky first-person interviews and encounters across the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe" •Elle "A much-needed cry of tough, informed humanism, needed now more than ever." •Christian Science Monitor "At the top of my list: I Was Told to Come Alone: My Journey Behind the Lines of Jihad by Souad Mekhennet, a courageous Muslim journalist who risks her life to get the truth from ISIS leaders." •Gail Sheehy, Politico

Souad Mekhennet is a correspondent for The Washington Post's national security desk, and she has reported on terrorism for The New York Times, The International Herald Tribune, and NPR. She is the co-author of The Eternal Nazi, Children of Jihad, and Islam. She was a 2012 Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, and she is a visiting fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Policy at Harvard, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and the Geneva Center for Security Policy.

Simply a must read. Souad Mekhennet's tenacity, skill, upbringing, and cultural deftness combine to allow her to tell a more nuanced story of how terrorism has evolved since 9/11 than about anything else out there. But even more importantly, she does so by freshly illuminating her own path as a journalist and evolving identity as a Muslim in the West with openness, kindness, humor, and candor that makes her story so compelling. A genuinely human and evocative portrayal of problems some want to keep so foreign, but in fact can only be solved when we get close and understand.

Guaranteed to make you think differently about the world.

This engrossing memoir reads like a thriller. I just kept turning the pages and devouring it, and finally, I didn't start a new chapter until I had time to finish it, because I found myself putting off urgent tasks. I finally finished it on a long international flight. It is the fascinating journey of a young journalist who covers Islamic terrorists and tries to decode why they are targeting Europe and coalescing into the brutally repressive caliphate of ISIS. It begins with her genesis as the daughter of immigrants from Turkey and Morocco, and how she came of age facing some of the rejection and racism that would be cited by her subjects among the reasons why they became terrorists. As she jumps on planes and travels around the world, you will gain many insights into the events behind the headlines of terrorist attacks in Belgium, Paris, and other places. She recounts her conversations with members of terror cells, argues with them about their justifications for killing innocent people, and at times puts up with their proposals that she become their second or third wife, or in one memorable scene, listens to them propose beheading her American journalist colleague. In the end the violence hits close to home. The story is told in a simple, conversational style that doesn't get in the way of the amazing reporting adventures she is recounting. This should be read by foreign policy wonks, by adolescents and young adults, by specialists in terrorism, and by government officials who are involved in coping with the huge wave of immigrants from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. There is so much to learn from this book. It should be required reading at all journalism schools, so students can learn from her methodology and her decision-making in reporting on fast-moving events.

This is a good book and very enlightening but not what I expected, and a bit disappointing in one key area. I anticipated and would have liked to read more detail about the conversations the author had with the cowardly murderers behind groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS. Also the author clearly wants badly for readers to recognize that all Muslims do not think like these people do (which is no doubt true) but does not examine the core religious texts to show where these people went wrong. The book offers a lot of behind the scenes detail about some infamous attacks in Europe that were exceptionally interesting. Possibly the most important information in the book are the descriptions of the lives and surroundings of many of the refugees in Europe. It sounds like a vicious circle, refugees are accepted physically and are cared for but are otherwise ignored and shunned, but then who would want to hire them or befriend them when so many violent attacks have been perpetrated by people like them?

I'm a big fan of looking at issues from 'outside the box' and trying to see old problems through a new lens. This book does just that. Stanford has a program that requires incoming freshmen to read three books. I hope this becomes one of those in the next few years. A great read!

I found this book very scary but interesting. It's written in a very "plain" style but is easy to follow. Souad had some very frightening experiences, especially with her being a Muslim woman. If you're interested in other cultures and in the thinking of terrorists, you'll get both of those things.

A very interesting read. I wonder where people like Souad find their courage.

It is a very disturbing book to read about reality in the world today

Nice book. Different look on how you approach reporting.

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