

# The Looming Tower Chapter Summaries

## The Looming Tower

### Chapter One: The Martyr (Sayyid Qutb)

Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) -- the subject of this chapter -- arrived in America in 1948, three years after the end of World War II. Coming from Egypt, he set foot in a land that was basking in its war victory and relishing its economic wealth, a stark contrast to the poor, jobless and depressed country from just 7 years before. Although Qutb was born and raised in a destitute village in Upper Egypt, at the age of 42, he had already made a name for himself in the field of education in his homeland. He was the Minister of Education for the government, but his literary criticism of the Egyptian government forced him to exile to America.

Making his home in New York, Qutb entered a city that was rich with sexual desire and racial tensions, only furthering his belief that the Western world was infused with immoral perversion. His aspiration was that Islam would dominate the world, and that the strict moral guidelines of the Quran would govern, above all else. Shortly after Qutb entered college in Washington, D.C., the leader of the Supreme Guide of the Society of the Muslim Brothers, Hasan al-Banna was assassinated in Egypt on February 12, 1949. Qutb was shocked by this event, and this would be the turning point for the eventual assimilation of Qutb and the Muslim Brothers.

Qutb moved to Greeley, Colorado in the summer of 1949 to attend the Colorado State College of Education. At first, Greeley was a community that held all of the attributes that Qutb held dear, which were education, music, art, literature, and religion. Although this small town appeared to be a quiet, quaint town, Qutb disapproved of the socially progressive women, and the racial tensions that ran rampant. Then, after an eight month residence in California, Qutb decided to return home to Egypt. He viewed America as a sexual and spiritual wasteland, and thought that God disagreed with the central focus of the country.

Upon return to Egypt, Qutb wasted no time voicing his dissatisfaction with American ways. He announced that the Egyptian's number one enemy was the white man, no doubt stemming from his multiple interactions with racial discrimination in America, and that modernity would be the fall of the Islam culture. Meanwhile, in Egypt, a war was brewing. The Egyptians were trying to overthrow the British government, and the Muslim Brothers were at the very heart of it. During this time, the Muslim Brothers, with the interest of the people in mind, created their own hospitals, schools, factories, welfare societies and even their own army. In 1948, however, the Egyptian government officially dissolved the Muslim Brothers because it feared the organization's power. At this point, the Brothers directed their attacks on Cairo itself. After they successfully burned most of the city of Cairo, Qutb and his compatriots in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 overthrew King Farouk (an ineffectual ruler who was sympathetic to the British) and took control of the Egyptian government. This was the first time in twenty-five hundred years that Egypt was ruled by Egyptians.

In 1954 Qutb became the editor of the Muslim Brothers magazine, *Al-Mawwa al-Ma'mun*. As the editor of the magazine, Qutb began to write editorials calling for jihad against the British. Simultaneously, Nasser was negotiating a treaty which called for an end to the British occupation. In August 1954, the magazine was shut down because Nasser disliked Qutb's calls for an Islamic Revolution and his secret alliance with Egyptian communists who were trying to overthrow Nasser. On October 26, 1954, during an address in Alexandria, a member of the Brothers fired eight shots at Nasser in an attempt to kill him. The shooter missed completely. This gave Nasser the popularity of the people. Nasser used this popularity to hang six conspirators and place thousands of other in concentration camps. Qutb was charged for being a part of the Brother's secret apparatus, which was responsible of the assassination attempt. Qutb was put in prison for his involvement.

While in prison, Qutb wrote two politically charged books, *In the Shade of the Quran* and *Milestones*, which was banned when published in 1964. In his book *Milestones* (smuggled out of prison), he provides an apocalyptic analysis of the world. "Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice," Qutb points at the beginning. Humanity is threatened not only by nuclear annihilation but also by the absence of values. The West has lost its vitality, and Marxism has failed. "At this crucial and bewildering juncture, the turn of Islam, and the Muslim community has arrived." But, before Islam can lead, it must regenerate itself. (29) Qutb divided the world into two camps, Islam and jahiliyya, the period of ignorance and barbarity that existed before the divine message of the Prophet Mohammed. Qutb uses the term to encompass all of modern life: manners, morals, art, literature, law, even what passed as Islamic culture. He was opposed not to modern technology but to the worship of science, which he believed had alienated humanity from natural harmony with creation. Only a complete rejection of rationalism and Western values offered the slim hope of the redemption of Islam. This was the choice: pure, primitive Islam or the doom of mankind. (30) Humanity cannot be saved unless Muslims recapture the glory of their earliest and purest expression. "We need to initiate the movement of Islamic revival in some Muslim country," he writes, in order to fashion an example that will eventually lead Islam to its destiny of world domination. "There should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking the path," Qutb declared. "I have written *Milestones* for this vanguard." (30)

On April 19, 1966 the trial of Sayyid Qutb and forty-two of his followers began. The only real evidence produced was his manifesto *Milestones*, which caused him to be given the death sentence. On August 29, 1966 Qutb was hanged, but his legacy lived on.

#### **Lecture notes:**

"The Great Divide" / Saw Israeli and the West as one enemy.

West: democracy, spiritual corruption, materialism, sex, sin, etc... Qutb saw open discussions of sexuality, promiscuous women, racism, hypocrisy. America is a "spiritual wasteland."

**The Looming Tower** is a detailed account of the events leading to the September 11 attacks, authored by Lawrence Wright. The book intricately weaves together the lives of key figures in the history of terrorism, particularly focusing on Osama bin Laden and the FBI agent John O'Neill. Throughout the chapters, Wright provides an in-depth analysis of the socio-political context that shaped the rise of radical Islam and the failures of U.S. intelligence leading up to the attacks. This article presents chapter summaries of "The Looming Tower," offering a comprehensive understanding of its themes and characters.

## Chapter Summaries

## **Chapter 1: The Man Who Knew**

In the opening chapter, readers are introduced to John O'Neill, a dedicated FBI agent whose career is marked by a growing obsession with the growing threat of Islamic terrorism. O'Neill is portrayed as a man who understands the gravity of the situation long before his superiors do. This chapter sets the tone for O'Neill's tragic trajectory and outlines the challenges he faces within the bureaucratic structures of the FBI, especially regarding the agency's handling of terrorism.

## **Chapter 2: The Rise of Bin Laden**

This chapter delves into the early life of Osama bin Laden, exploring his privileged upbringing in Saudi Arabia, his role in the Afghan-Soviet war, and the ideological foundations that would lead him to become the face of global jihad. Wright discusses bin Laden's connections with radical groups and how his experiences shaped his worldview, ultimately leading to the formation of al-Qaeda.

## **Chapter 3: The 1993 World Trade Center Bombing**

Wright recounts the events surrounding the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, a pivotal moment in the history of terrorism in America. This chapter highlights the failures of intelligence agencies to connect the dots, as well as the implications of the attack for U.S. security policies. O'Neill's role in the investigation is emphasized, showcasing his commitment to understanding the motivations behind such acts of violence.

## **Chapter 4: The Al-Qaeda Network**

In this chapter, Wright examines the growth of al-Qaeda and its network of operatives. The author discusses the various factions within the organization, their recruitment strategies, and their operational tactics. This chapter provides insights into how bin Laden and his followers planned and executed attacks, as well as how they managed to evade detection by intelligence agencies.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the primary focus of Chapter 1 in 'The Looming Tower'?**

Chapter 1 introduces the backgrounds of key figures, including Osama bin Laden and the rise of al-Qaeda, setting the stage for understanding the motivations behind the September 11 attacks.

### **How does Chapter 2 depict the relationship between the FBI and CIA?**

Chapter 2 highlights the bureaucratic tensions and failures in communication between the FBI and CIA in the years leading up to 9/11, emphasizing how these failures contributed to the inability to prevent the attacks.

## **What significant events are covered in Chapter 3 regarding the al-Qaeda network?**

Chapter 3 delves into the formation and expansion of al-Qaeda, detailing the group's operations and strategic planning, including the influence of previous terrorist acts that shaped their agenda.

## **What role does Richard Clarke play in 'The Looming Tower' as discussed in Chapter 4?**

In Chapter 4, Richard Clarke is portrayed as a key figure in U.S. counterterrorism efforts, providing insights into his actions and recommendations to address the growing threat posed by al-Qaeda.

## **What themes are explored in Chapter 5 regarding the events of 9/11?**

Chapter 5 explores themes of tragedy and loss, detailing the harrowing moments of the September 11 attacks and the immediate responses from various agencies and the public.

## **How does Chapter 6 address the aftermath of 9/11 and its implications?**

Chapter 6 discusses the aftermath of the attacks, including the U.S. government's response, the declaration of the War on Terror, and the long-term implications for national security and foreign policy.

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