

The 9/11 Wars by Jason Burke. Allen Lane 2011.

Jason Burke ranks, in my view, with Gilles Keppel and Ahmed Rashid, as one of the outstanding observers of the convulsions that have transformed the Middle East and the rest of the world since the terrorist assault on America of September 2001 inspired by Osama bin Laden.

Since the ninth of September 2001 there have been attacks, wars, and further terrorist outrages that have blighted or cost the lives of countless thousands of people in many countries, changing the world we live in forever, promoting disharmony and mistrust to a level that may never be assuaged.

The 9/11 Wars is divided into six parts: Afghanistan, America, Al-Qaeda: 2001-3; Escalation: 2003-4; Europe: The Darkest Days: 2005-6; Iraq and the Turning: 2005-7; Afghanistan, Pakistan and Al-Qaeda: 2008; Endgames: 2009-11.

Some of the events and actions that Burke describes have been written about exhaustively in books of their own, but he has the benefit of time in certain key areas, not least with regard to the first attacks on Afghanistan post 9/11 and the fundamental errors committed then, and the debacle of Iraq, from which to offer fresh perspectives and assessments.

In addition, Burke has lived and worked in the areas about which he writes and is familiar with some of the key protagonists. Apart from much else *The 9/11 Wars* is testimony to the bravery that he shares with other correspondents who go to dangerous places to bring us the truth that we might otherwise never know.

The 9/11 Wars ends as it began with a named Afghan, Ali Shah, a powerful reminder of the individual suffering inflicted on friend and foe alike by this conflict, and further with uncertainty for Shah, which reflects the uncertainty and unpredictability for all of us that began on September 11th 2001 and is unlikely to end for many decades to come.

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