

MR. LAWRENCE WRIGHT
"THE LOOMING TOWER: AL-QAEDA AND THE ROAD TO 9/11 "
FRIDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 2007

Mike Myatt: Welcome to tonight's program with Mr. Lawrence Wright, a staff writer for the New York magazine, screenwriter and author. The program tonight is sponsored by the Marines Memorial Association, the World Affairs Council of Northern California, and Stacey's Independent Bookstore. Moderating tonight's audience question period is California State Librarian Emeritus, noted author, and professor of history at the University of Southern California, Dr. Kevin Star. We are extremely fortunate to have Mr. Wright here to talk about some of what he has learned through his five years of research and hundreds of interviews about al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and the intelligence breakdowns. As a result of his research, he has written a book, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*. For his work he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in May of this year. Lawrence Wright is an author of six other books, a screenwriter, a playwright and staff writer for the New Yorker magazine. He graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans, from the American University in Cairo, and he's won awards for his reporting. He co-wrote the script for the movie *The Siege* during- starring Denzel Washington and Bruce Willis plus other scripts for other movies. Please join me in warm welcome for Mr. Lawrence Wright.

Lawrence Wright: Thank you, General. I've really been tremendously impressed lately by the Marines. I've got to say yesterday I went to- I had- I was awakened at reveille for breakfast and had the opportunity to talk to 1200 Marines and it's something the- I will never forget, the opportunity to look in the faces of the young men and women who are really putting their lives on the line for this, for our opportunity to come together and talk freely and openly and with our hearts about what we want to do with our own society. And I have got to compliment the Marines on this alliance with the World Affairs Council and these kinds of-- This is I think unprecedented. I've never heard of such an interesting melange of a military group and a civilian group like the World Affairs Council creating this kind of author series, and you've got some amazing-- I wish I were here to hear all of them but anyway I'm pleased to be a part of it tonight. I'm going to talk to you a little bit tonight about al-Qaeda, who these guys are, where they came from, where they are today, where they hope to go in the future. As General Myatt said, 30 years ago I was a young teacher at the American University in Cairo and one of the sociologists at that school, a very distinguished sociologist named Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim decided to do a study of the young men who were in the 1970s, early '70s, at that point, filling up the prisons in Egypt. Who are these radical young Islamists? To his surprise, he found that they were not rural rubes or anything like that. They were for the most part ambitious, well-educated young men. They were drawn to the fields of science and engineering. He called them model young Egyptians. Then decades later another man, Marc Sageman, who was a CIA case officer in Pakistan during the Jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan and is a psychiatrist, a combo you don't run in to every day. Sageman did a similar study. Who are these young men that were filling up the al-Qaeda camps in the 1990s? Sageman's study largely mirrors that of Saad Eddin Ibrahim. He found that these were not impoverished social failures. They were for the most part well-educated young men from intact families. They were oftentimes middle to upper class. They were

not the product of religious schools. Many of them had been educated in Europe or America. Some of them spoke as many as five or six languages. They had no obvious mental disorders and interestingly enough many of them weren't even very religious when they went in to al-Qaeda. In other words, they were a lot like us. So what is it? What is it that radicalizes these young men? If you go back to the Saad Eddin Ibrahim study, one of the things he discovered is that most of these young men were away from home. They were streaming in to the big university towns of Cairo, Alexandria, Mansurah. They were away from their family, away from their roots, oftentimes for the first time in their lives. Sageman noticed the same phenomenon. He called it displacement. Ninety percent of the young men who joined Jihad did so in a country other than the one in which they were reared. They were away from their family. They were away from their homes for the first time in their lives. This was just as true for a Moroccan in Paris as for a Yemeni laborer in Saudi Arabia. The common element was that they were away from their home, 90% of them. Now I want to distinguish between radicalization in the West and radicalization in the Muslim world. I think that they are similar but they have different root causes. Let's think back about these recent plots in the UK. Remember last summer the airplanes plot where they were going to blow up a dozen flights over the Atlantic or more recently the doctors plot. What strikes me about those plots is that these were not second- or third-generation immigrants. They were native-born British citizens. They had-- Their families had been there for two or three generations. It strikes me that Marc Sageman's term of displacement really doesn't apply anymore. I prefer to use the term "marginality." By that I mean a lack of attachment to the culture that one lives in, a sense of social impotence. I think this really reflects the failure of European societies to integrate their alienated Muslim minorities. The situation is really acute in the United Kingdom right now where according to MI5, their domestic intelligence service, there are 2,000 radicals that they're following and 200 different cells and more than 100 people right now awaiting trial on terrorism charges. These young men, and they're almost all young men, feel neither authentically British nor Pakistani. They're caught between. It's not really a clash of civilizations. It's a clash of identities within a civilization. Let's take the example of Belgium. The number one name for a child born in Belgium today is Muhammad. Now it's really not that surprising. The number one name for any given child in the whole world today is Muhammad but suppose you're of Flemish ancestry. No doubt you're thinking where is this going? What's going to happen to my country's precious place in the world, our language, our history? And if you're Muhammad no doubt you are saying to yourself, "These people don't want me. I'll never be one of them." And maybe Muhammad doesn't speak Arabic and maybe Muhammad has never been to Morocco. He is lost. There's practically no one in the world more lost than he and it's not surprising that he would go to the mosque and he would associate with other angry and alienated young men like he and that the AMOM[ph?] would minister to those feelings and that for them Islam would become more than a religion; it would become an identity. Now I'm briefly going to divert to- point to how different the situation is right now in America. We are so blessed with our Muslim and Arab population. The average American Muslim makes about the same wages the average American, is about as likely to be rich or poor as the average American, is about as likely to go to college or graduate school as the average American, is much less likely to go to prison. Compare that to the situation in France for instance where you have- about 10% of the population is Muslim, 50% of the prisoners are. What a stark measure of the degree of alienation in that society and I just want to point out that right now in northern Europe there are more Muslims than Catholics and in southern Europe there are more Muslims than Protestants. Now several years ago I was having Iftar with a group of radical Islamists in Birmingham, England. Iftar is the meal you take to break the fast at the end of the day in the month of Ramadan, and one of my

companions said that he supported the kidnapping and beheading of aid workers in Iraq and I thought to myself he's dangerous. And we have people like him in this country. But I looked around the room at my other dinner companions and what I saw were nodding heads agreeing with his statement and I thought what's really dangerous are those nodding heads because they surround him with a community of approval. They allow him to think those thoughts and perhaps act on them and to recruit others to his cause, and that's what we don't have in this country, at least not yet. It doesn't mean we're immune. The 2007 Pew poll of Muslim Americans found that most Muslims believe that life has gotten much harder for them since 9/11 and only 40% of Muslim Americans believe that Arabs caused 9/11. These feelings of anxiety and denial are really much more typical of alienated marginalized populations than assimilated ones. Five percent of American Muslims, however, had a favorable view of al-Qaeda and in a population of 2-1/2 million Muslim Americans that's 125,000 highly radicalized people, certainly enough for a home-grown movement should it arise, and already you can see that we have our own home-grown problems in the recent Fort Dix plot, in the recent plot to blow up John F. Kennedy Airport. However poorly formed, these are our own home-grown radicals. A New York City Police Department study of home-grown radicals in the West recently concluded the transformation of a Western-based individual to a terrorist is not caused by oppression, suffering, revenge or desperation. Rather it is a phenomenon that occurs because the individual is looking for an identity and a cause and unfortunately often finds it in radical Islam. Now as I said, the situation is different in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Let's talk first of all about the Arab world. The Arab world reaches from Morocco to the Persian Gulf. It's larger than the United States. There are 300 million Arabs, about the same number as there are Americans. If you were to take oil out of the Arab economies, and only a few of the 22 Arab countries produce an appreciable amount of oil, the 300 million Arabs produce less for export than the 5 million Finns, essentially less than the Nokia telephone company, which is the main export of Finland. This is the little Nokia telephone I carried around with me in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis wouldn't let me in as a journalist. From about a year and a half after 9/11, I made repeated applications to go to the Kingdom but they simply wouldn't let me in and finally I realized they were never going to let me in as a reporter so I took a job. I became an expat worker and it was the most fortuitous piece of bad luck I ever had because instead of being a reporter in a hotel making calls, trying to get appointments, I had a job, I had an apartment, I had a car, I had to go to work every day, and I had all of these wonderful young Saudi reporters telling me much more about their society than I could ever have learned about it myself, but I often reflected that this one product, this little Nokia, outweighs the industrial output of the entire Arab world. Now let's put oil back in to those 22 countries that has 300 million people. The gross national product of those 22 Arab countries is still less than half of your state of California. Now let's talk about the Muslim world, 1.3 billion, 1.4 billion people, one fifth of the world's population, one half of the world's poor. The preponderance of the Muslim population-- They live in the 57 countries that comprise the organization of the Islamic Conference. The gross national product of those 57 countries is less than that of Germany so we are talking about economies that offer their young people very little to look forward to. Now I'm going to talk about some other factors that I think are critical in this creation of radicalism but they are less easy to quantify than economic factors, first of all, civil society. What is civil society? This is civil society, civilians, citizens coming together, talking about common affairs, things that they're interested in. Let me tell you about what life in Saudi Arabia is like for the young reporters I was mentoring. There are no movies, no theaters, no plays, no nightclubs, no music. The internet is monitored and controlled. There's no dating. There are very few parks or museums. There's no political life. There are no political parties, no labor unions. That entire space of life

that we call civil society simply doesn't exist. There's nothing between the government and the mosque except shopping. Recently in Jeddah a new IKEA furniture store opened its doors and it was such a thrilling event that 15,000 people showed up. Two were trampled to death. In such a barren social environment, it's not surprising that people are depressed. All of my reporters were depressed. They couldn't sleep at night. They bit their fingernails down to the nubs. One of my reporters did a story about a study of depression and it was done at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, bin Laden's alma mater. Of the 2,000 students surveyed, 65% of the boys and 72% of the girls showed symptoms of depression. Seven percent of the girls, Muslim girls in a strict Muslim country, admitted that they had attempted suicide. Now another factor hard to quantify but critical in my opinion is the absence of female companionship. This meeting tonight would not take place in Saudi Arabia or in some other Muslim countries. The women wouldn't be here. Now it takes a toll. It takes a toll on the women. And I'll tell you the story of one of my female reporters in Saudi Arabia, Najila Fappi.[ph?] First of all, she's entirely covered in black. She's wearing the abaya, the black robe all Saudi women wear, and the hijab to cover her head and the niqab to cover her face. This last is optional but every year she tries to make her outfit more shapeless and more conservative. This is her will. She doesn't have to have the niqab for instance. One morning she had an important appointment in Riyadh before the first plane from Jeddah where we were working could arrive. Now as a Saudi woman she can't drive. She has to get the approval of her nearest male relative to travel at all, her father, her husband, her brother, even her son, whoever is the man in charge. So she gets her father's approval and she flies in to Riyadh the night before her appointment. As it happened, as a single Saudi woman she can't stay in a hotel so she comes off the airplane and sits down in a chair and a guard comes along and says, "What are you doing here? We're closing the airport. It's 11 o'clock." And she said, "What are you going to do with me?" I remember that attitude. What could he do with her? Finally he allowed her to sleep on the carpet of the mosque in the airport and then he turned out the lights and locked the door and the next morning the guards came back and turned on the lights and Najila went to her appointment. That's what it's like for a Saudi woman reporter but it takes a toll on the men too. They're deprived of the solace and the companionship that women provide. They haven't spent their adolescence molding their behavior around pleasing girls, which is a lot of what civilization really is. That's right. It's not so easy to be a terrorist if your girlfriend won't let you. Now let me speak about another intuitive thing that I think contributes so much to this phenomenon and that is the word "humiliation." I don't know how many of you read or saw one of bin Laden's videotapes that came out last week. The first one was called The Solution and the solution is that you should all convert to Islam but in there he uses the word "humiliation." It's one of the most common words in his vocabulary. You see it all the time and many Muslim men have been humiliated physically sometimes like Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two guy in al-Qaeda, a doctor, surgeon, locked up in 1981 after the assassination of Sadat, for three years tortured, locked in a cage with starving wild dogs. He came out of that prison hungry for blood and I think that's one of the reasons al-Qaeda has such an appetite for carnage, which really distinguishes it from any other terrorist group. It really wants to kill as many people as possible because the Egyptians which--and it is largely an Egyptian organization--many of them really have been humiliated but bin Laden really rich, young, charismatic, from one of the finest families in Saudi Arabia. He was never humiliated. So why does the concept of humiliation rise so frequently in his vocabulary? Why does it resonate so powerfully with Muslims all over the world? I think he's speaking to a sense of cultural loss that many Muslims feel. They know that once there was only one super power. It was Islam. It reached from Arabia to Spain to southern China. You can ironically enough

date the moment when Islam began its long retreat to September 11th, 1683, which is the day the King of Poland arrived to repel the Ottoman siege of Vienna and turn back the furthest advance of Muslim armies in Europe. I think that moment is very, very critical in bin Laden's mind and in that of many Muslims. They have a sense that Islam's proper place in the world has been usurped and they long to strike back at the West for the perceived injustices that have been inflicted upon them, and this feeling is reinforced by constant images of Muslims under siege in Lebanon, in Palestine, in Iraq. I was just telling General Myatt I was in Saudi Arabia during the war and I watched the war against Iraq on Fox and Al Jazeera, two rather similar news organizations. Each was wedded to a particular narrative. On Fox it was America's liberation of the oppressed Iraqi people. On Al Jazeera it was the continuing humiliation of the Arabs. There were countless shots of surrendering Iraqi troops with their hands behind their heads shuffling past the Americans. There's one scene I'll never forget. Maybe you saw it too. I first saw it on CNN, a retired American general in a turtleneck explaining to the audience the proper way in which a pair of U.S. Marines are evacuating a home that they intend to search. "Notice their stance on either side of the door," the general says as the father is made to bring out his wife and children. "Notice the proper way their fingers are on the outside of the trigger guard," the general says, ignoring the faces of three little girls whose lips are quivering and whose eyes are so wide with fright it's as if they could explode. "Notice the way the soldiers have taken control of the situation," the general says as the family is made to kneel in front of the Americans. Well, it's one thing to see that on CNN. It's quite another to see it on Al Jazeera where that scene was captured and rebroadcast endlessly, obsessively, ritualistically because it captured so poignantly the theme of the war from the Arab perspective. This sense of humiliation is augmented by pervasive feelings of weakness and dependency. Imagine living in a culture where everything you touch is made somewhere else, not just your Nokia phone. Say in Saudi Arabia, a country once famous for its coffee, if- now you go to Starbuck's. Even if you're a terrorist, your weapons are made in China or Russia or the United States. Everything you put your hands on is made somewhere else. Your culture has contributed so little. The usual measures of excellence, Olympic champions, Nobel Prize winners, are practically absent in the Muslim world. There are so few heroes or role models and that's why the voice of Osama bin Laden sounds so loud. It's my theory that this cycle of humiliation turns itself in to a longing for revenge. Bin Laden had a strategy when he attacked America. He wanted to draw us in to Afghanistan where we would replicate the mistake that the Soviet Union made. You remember this, Christmas Eve 1979. Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan almost absentmindedly with no apparent purpose and they stayed there for ten years bleeding in to Afghan soil and finally they withdrew in 1989 and what happened? The Soviet Union fell apart; it dissolved; it shattered. Bin Laden and many other Muslims believed it was Muslims that delivered that mortal blow, Muslims who defeated the atheistic communist empire. Bin Laden actually believed that he could draw America in to that same trap and that the United States would become the Disunited States. Well, he miscalculated. It took only six weeks for American and coalition troops to pummel the Taliban, sweep them aside. If you read al-Qaeda's own internal memoranda, they admit their own membership, 80% of them, were captured or killed. Yes, the leaders got away but they were scattered, they were isolated, they were impoverished, they were unable to communicate, and they were repudiated all over the world. The war on terror was dead. Al-Qaeda was a zombie. It was homeless. It was the invasion of Iraq that blew life back in to that monster. Iraq looks a lot like what bin Laden had in mind for us in Afghanistan. Iraq offered him a whole new country to train in but it was no longer the al-Qaeda we knew. Al-Qaeda strategists had planned for this day as early as 1998, the year al-Qaeda bombed the embassies- American embassies in east Africa. The al-Qaeda strategists

had been planning for the future of al-Qaeda. They realized it would no longer be the top-down, hierarchical organization that the business student, Osama bin Laden, had designed where you for instance had to sign a form in triplicate to get a new spare tire, where on the other hand you had a salary, you had health benefits, you had a month-long paid vacation. It was a good job for a lot of guys, al-Qaeda was, but the strategists knew this couldn't last. They began to plan for a new al-Qaeda that would be composed of a network of small gangs which would spring up spontaneously and operate more like street gangs. You saw that at work in Madrid, in London. That was the al-Qaeda they already had in mind. These groups had few if any real-life connection to each other but they were tied together by the internet which offered them a safe place to conspire. The al-Qaeda strategists consciously began supplying this online generation with a legacy of plans, targets, ideology and methods but nothing is as important to al-Qaeda as real-world training, which is why the sanctuary in Afghanistan was so important. Now I just told you that in December 2001 al-Qaeda was dead but far from being homeless now al-Qaeda's deeply rooted in many countries, some of which it really wasn't present in before 9/11. It's got new sanctuaries, Somalia, the Sunni areas of Iraq, the tribal areas of Pakistan, probably again in Afghanistan, even in Mali. How has al-Qaeda been able to achieve this? In 1998, Abu Bakr Naji, one of the chief al-Qaeda strategists, published his master work on the internet called *The Management of Savagery*. Savagery, Abu Bakr Naji pointed out, offers danger but also opportunity. He advised the young jihadis to attack the economic centers of Arab and African countries, the tourist sites, the oil refineries, force the government to concentrate its power on protecting those valuable resources and leaving the periphery open and prey to chaos and barbarism. In such an environment people will turn to any strong force for order, even the source that created that chaos in the first place. That's what you saw with the Taliban. That's what you saw in Somalia. That's what you see now in Iraq. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the late leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, brought the management of savagery to a whole new level. He introduced the signature of the postmodern barbarian by cutting off the head of an American contractor and posting a video of it on the internet and then beginning his assault on Shiite mosques while worshippers were at prayer purposely creating an Islamic civil war which is undermining any attempt to create a unified democratic Iraq. It is that legacy of Zarqawi that is afflicting us now. In 2005, Fouad Hussein, a Jordanian journalist, created-produced the most definitive outline of al-Qaeda's master plan in his biography of Zarqawi. It's chilling to read this work and realize how closely events have hewn to al-Qaeda's forecast. According to Hussein, al-Qaeda formulated a 20-year plan that began on 9/11, the stage he calls the awakening. "By striking America," he writes, "the head of the serpent, al-Qaeda would cause the U.S. to lose consciousness and act chaotically against those who attacked it." This stage ended in 2003 when American troops entered Baghdad. Now that American troops were drawn in to the Middle East, the second eye-opening stage began in which Iraq became a recruiting ground for young jihadis. This stage was supposed to last until 2006. In the third stage, a rising and standing up, al-Qaeda will focus on Syria, Turkey, and at long last Iraq. The fourth stage, lasting until 2013, will see Iraq- see al-Qaeda overthrowing Arab governments. Attacks on the petroleum industry will weaken Western economies and American power will continue to deteriorate in the constantly expanding universe of confrontation. In the fifth stage an Islamic caliphate will be declared. The balance of power will finally tip in the favor of the radical Islamists. Israel will no longer be able to defend itself. The sixth phase beginning in the year 2016 will be a phase of total confrontation. The caliphate will inaugurate an Islamic army and begin a final apocalyptic war with the unbelievers resulting in total victory in the year 2020. That is al-Qaeda's master plan and it's given force by the longing of so many young Muslims to turn history around. The failure of the American project in

Iraq is bound to embolden al-Qaeda and radical Islamists everywhere. The departure of the U.S. forces offers the immediate prospect of a wider regional war, greater radicalization, ethnic cleansing, the immolation of oil facilities, the decline of American standing in the world, the very chaos that al-Qaeda seeks to create. If we remain, if we stay the course, we can all foresee the loss of thousands of American lives, 2 trillion dollars of treasure according to the Iraq study group, and no obvious route to anything like victory. It's no wonder Americans are so pessimistic in this contest. Now I know people always get depressed when I talk and I'm sorry about that but I'm going to now give you three reasons why al-Qaeda won't win. Let me make it four, at the top of the list those young American soldiers that I talked to yesterday. The next reason al-Qaeda won't win: Everyone is his enemy. When American and coalition forces went in to Afghanistan in 2001 they went through all the al-Qaeda camps and they picked up all these papers and one of the papers they picked up in one of the training camps was a list of enemies. Who are al-Qaeda's enemies? Number one, heretics; number two, Shiites; number three, Israel; number four, America. Well, that's a lot of enemies for one little terrorist group but the list keeps expanding. According to Abu Musab al-Suri, another one of the chief Al-Qaeda strategists, the list now includes Jews, Westerners in general, members of the NATO Alliance, Russia, China, atheists, pagans, and hypocrites. A lot of nervous laughter out there. Another reason al-Qaeda won't win: Most of its victims are Muslims. More than twice-- Probably three or four times as many Muslims have died at the hands of al-Qaeda in Iraq alone and look at the attacks that took place after 9/11 in Jakarta, Riyadh, Casablanca, Istanbul, Algiers. These are Muslim countries. Most victims are Muslims and Muslims know this. They know that they will be the people to really suffer if al-Qaeda comes to power. And the final reason that al-Qaeda can never win is that it offers nothing, nothing, to the people who follow it. Let's say for the sake of amusement that Osama bin Laden was standing here instead of Lawrence Wright and you had the opportunity to ask him, "Okay, Mr. bin Laden. Say you've got Egypt. Say you've got Saudi Arabia. What are you going to do with- about the real problems of the Muslim world, joblessness, illiteracy, gender apartheid?" Did you see the other day that in one of his videotapes he criticized the United States for the second time that I know of for not signing the Quito Treaty? Has anybody seen al-Qaeda's environmental policy? By the way, what kind of economic model does he follow? Mr. bin Laden, are you a Marxist? Are you a Khanzian?[ph?] Are you a free marketeer? I don't think you've ever said. What's your health and education policy, agriculture? He's never thought of those things. Al-Qaeda doesn't believe in politics because it doesn't believe in the future. It has no vision. It's not really a political movement. It only offers one thing to the young people who join it and that is death. I was in Peshawar, Pakistan, a few years ago, which is where al-Qaeda was born in August of 1988, and I had the opportunity to talk to Rahimullah Yusufzai, a distinguished Pakistani reporter, and he recalled coming upon an encampment of Arab fighters in an open field during the jihad against the Soviets and they were camped in white tents and he said to them, "What are you thinking? You can easily be seen from the air. The Soviet air force will wipe you out." And one of the Arabs responded by saying, "But we came to die." That's the soil in which al-Qaeda was planted. Al-Qaeda-- We think of it as a terror organization but for the young men who join it it's really a suicide machine. It's fueled by the despair that runs through the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda offers these young men a chance to make history. All they have to do is die. Now I'm going to close by telling you a little anecdote about my brief experience with the CIA. The CIA approached me because I'm a screenwriter and asked me to write a scenario about what they would do if they caught bin Laden. Well, this is the most optimistic scenario imaginable, right, the CIA catching bin Laden. And I said to them, "I'm also a reporter but I- so I can't go writing screenplays for the CIA but I'll tell you what I think

in the form of an op ed for the New York Times. Let's start with the fact that bin Laden's the most famous man in the world right now. He is going to be one of the most famous men in history. You can't just deal with Osama bin Laden, the man. You have to deal with bin Ladenism, the legacy that he's going to leave for untold generations. So if you have the amazing good fortune to catch Osama bin Laden, don't kill him. That's what he seeks. His martyrdom will seal his legacy in amber for all time. But don't bring him to America, at least not yet. Take him first of all to Kenya where on August 7th, 1998, al-Qaeda set off a bomb in front of an American embassy killing 211 people. More than 150 people were blinded by the flying glass. Let him sit in a courtroom in Nairobi and tell 150 blind Africans that he was just striking at a symbol of American power. Then you could take him to Tanzania where on the same day al-Qaeda set off another bomb killing 11 people, all of them Muslims. Al-Qaeda excuses this because it was a Friday and good Muslims would be in the mosque. What a good venue to ask what is a good Muslim? Then you could bring him to America, have him answer for the death of 19 sailors on the USS Cole in October of 2000 and the 3,000 Americans who passed away on 9/11 but don't stop there. You could take him so many places. You could take him to London. You could take him to Madrid. You could take him to Casablanca. You could take him so many places. Just take him one last place. Take him home. Take him back to Saudi Arabia and try him under Sharia law, the only law that he and his followers would respect, and if he's convicted he'll be taken to a square in downtown Riyadh called Chop Chop Square. It's Saudi tradition that the executioner, a big man with a long sword, goes out to the crowd who are composed of the families of the victims of this condemned man and he begs them to forgive this man and if they can't do that the executioner does his job and bin Laden will be taken and buried in an unmarked Wahhabi graveyard. And I think in that way you could begin to roll back some of his awful legacy. Thank you very much.

Dr. Kevin Star: For our listening audience, you've just heard Mr. Lawrence Wright speak on his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Looming Tower*. It's now time to take questions from the audience. Mr. Wright, a number of the questions have to do with complimenting your book and asking what was the most difficult emotional aspect of this writing project, of dealing with so much death and depression and difficult topics, etc. Did you ever really doubt that you could complete the work or that it was taking too much from you personally?

Lawrence Wright: No, but I was separated from my family for a long period of time and that was really hard and I remember when it came time to dedicate my book my wife came up to me and said, "Who are you dedicating it to?" And I said, "I'm not dedicating it. So many people died. What am I going to do? Dedicate it to my agent?" And she said, "You're making a mistake. You don't know what you put your family through." And I realized I'd been a little unconscious about that. I had been lonely but I hadn't really taken in to account how frightened they were and I was never really in danger but they were very anxious about that and so that was probably the biggest emotional problem I had.

Dr. Kevin Star: You cited, Sir, the tape of the- that was on CNN and then it was on Al Jazeera, the differences that-- We have a statement here that "As a wounded combat leader in the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan I would suggest our successes in Afghanistan are due largely to two

factors: Afghanistan is a special forces war and we fight as unconventionally as they do. Two, we have very liberal rules of engagement. We're not-- That these are-- And the fact that we are being asked in Iraq to exercise such a sophisticated- as you described a culturally challenged police force activity." Do you have thoughts on that, the two different campaigns?

Lawrence Wright: I agree with those observations. There is a difference though that we have to perceive is that in Afghanistan we were fighting an unconventional war but in Iraq we're fighting urban guerrilla warfare and you have to be a little more careful because the truth is that killing civilians breeds terrorism and it's unproductive. I think it's one of the greatest challenges that the American military has ever faced and they do have to be diplomats of our culture in that situation and they have to put themselves more at risk because they have to be more careful of the population. I think it's a really, really awful situation for our military to be in but I think that our military is adapting and learning how to respond to that threat. I think-- In many respects I think that the military has learned more from 9/11 than any other segment of our society.

Dr. Kevin Star: We have a number of questions related to the blockage of intelligence authority and cooperation and we have the question: Do the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the FBI and the other security agencies work better together now than they did before 9/11 as dramatized in your book?

Lawrence Wright: Yes, they do. In 2004, massive reforms to the intelligence community were instituted. There is now a National Counter-terrorism Center which I visited and- recently and it was designed as- by Disney imagineering and- but there NSA, CIA, FBI people are made to work together so some changes have been put in to effect but really the truth is we've got a long way to go in our- in helping our intelligence community catch up to the challenge. It's not just-- I think the sharing thing is essential but one- I'm- we've talked about Ali Soufan before, the- one of the heroes of my book, who was on 9/11 one of eight Arabic-speaking agents in the FBI. There are six now. The intelligence community does know that they need to address this problem but if you go up on the seventh floor of the FBI headquarters in Washington for instance, an organization that made its reputation fighting against the Mafia and the IRA to some extent, who's up there? Irish and Italian guys. It's-- You wouldn't have the FBI without them. They're the spine of the organization. It's no wonder they were effective in fighting against those organizations. They spoke the same languages, they came from the same neighborhoods, they knew who they were fighting against, but when you have people who can't even pronounce the names of the people that they're struggling against, when you have the head of the FBI counter-terrorism section testifying under oath that he doesn't know the difference between a Sunni and a Shiite and he thinks that's an irrelevant question then you are always going to have a failure of imagination, an inability to connect the dots. We have-- I'm just picking on the FBI but look. We got an embassy in Baghdad, a thousand people. According to the Iraqi study group, eight of them speak Arabic. How are you going to build a country if you can't read the newspaper?

Dr. Kevin Star: Given what you just said, Mr. Wright, this next question fits right in there. Why have there been no major terrorist attacks between 9/11 and today on American territory?

Lawrence Wright: This is a really interesting question. I told you that al-Qaeda was dead in 2001 and for about three years he was in a zombie state so it was really incapable of doing anything. Now al-Qaeda is distracted by Iraq just as we are. Now eventually one way or another we're going to be withdrawing our troops and when that happens these Iraqi jihadi veterans are going to be going back to their home countries and in to Europe and perhaps in to our country, and they're going to be hooking up with cells or disaffected young Muslims and they have been training against the most formidable military machine in the history of humankind. Imagine the kind of damage that they can do. That's one reason. The second reason is that Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two guy in al-Qaeda, wrote a letter to some of his followers a couple years ago and he advised them: Go do whatever you want. Kill the Westerners, kill the Jews, but if you're going to attack America clear it with us, clear it with the main guys. Now what does that mean? In my opinion, for Al Qaeda America is Broadway. It's the big leagues. They don't want to diminish the effect of 9/11 with a bunch of shopping mall bombs or subway explosions, which would be catastrophic in this country, and just think how easily they could be pulled off. I think that al-Qaeda, if you read them the way I do, they are deeply interested in several things. One, they want massive carnage. Two, they're deeply interested in symbols. Look at the first attack in 1998 on the American embassies, simultaneous bombings, unheard of precedent, against America's place in the rest of the world, very symbolic, then the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen Harbor in October of 2000 which- by a little fiberglass boat effectively sinking a billion-dollar American warship. Now some of al-Qaeda planners wanted to strike a freighter or something that would be easier but bin Laden insisted no, it has to be an American warship, and he wanted the attacking vessel to be as small and fragile as possible. He called that boat Muhammad. It was a deeply symbolic action. And then of course 9/11, the attack on the World Trade Center--the name itself tells you so much,--the attack on the Pentagon, the symbol of American military power, the intended attack on the U.S. capitol, simultaneously attacking the foremost symbols of American economic, political and military power in one day. There's a problem for al-Qaeda following that up. Now that I think is the main reason that we haven't been attacked yet.

Dr. Kevin Star: That leads right to the next question. Do you think that al-Qaeda's waiting to get off a crude nuclear device in the United States, that that would be their next plan, the next priority?

Lawrence Wright: It makes sense. It certainly would be in their aspiration. They would love to do that. I don't know if they're capable of it but one thing about al-Qaeda: They have a play book and they tend to always go back to things that they haven't accomplished like the World Trade Center which they've-- Radicalism was bombed in 1993 and al-Qaeda finished the job. One thing that I have been looking for that I haven't seen yet but I worry about is chemical or biological weapons, especially anthrax. Dr. Zawahiri himself oversaw the attempt by al-Qaeda to weaponize anthrax. I'm still not convinced that al-Qaeda wasn't involved in the anthrax mailings that followed 9/11. That-- Muhammad Ata studied crop dusting. Even Mosawi, the guy that they arrested in Minnesota, had crop dusting manuals on his

computer. Those are I think very, very serious things for the American intelligence community to keep a close eye on. Perhaps they're more likely in some respects than a dirty bomb or a real bomb.

Dr. Kevin Star: For our listening audience, you are listening to Mr. Lawrence Wright, Pulitzer Prize winning author of the book, *The Looming Tower*. Given what you've just said, Sir, our next question follows. Do you think the next major attack is that the threat to the United States is greater or the threat to Europe or European attack?

Lawrence Wright: I think Europe is in a very difficult position right now. It's the crucible where Islam and the West come together and the future of both entities is going to be decided in Europe I believe.

Dr. Kevin Star: We have a number of questions that relate to the issue of hate, death, the promise of the afterlife. These are rather dramatic categories for we in the West to think of as political motivations. Are they as powerful as you suggest?

Lawrence Wright: Well, the- religion is very much a part of the motivation and the- for some members of al-Qaeda, some of the martyrs in their cause, no doubt they're drawn to these visions of paradise that are sketched out of the 72 virgins, of the wine that flows, yet I still think that there's more to it than that, that in part they're driven by despair and in part by a sense of cultural loss. They're-- The truth is al-Qaeda is composed of many different individuals. There are as many idealists as there are neolists and the things that bring them in are various so no doubt Muhammad Atta was a religious fanatic but Jarrah, one of the other hijacking pilots, doesn't seem to have been so religious. So I think that there are different motivations that draw them in to a common cause.

Dr. Kevin Star: And of course part of your descriptions of motivations is this displacement to marginality and how did this occur? Did the internet have an effect on this? How would they know that they're marginal? A number of questions saying if they-- What was the source of this self-awareness that led to this sense of hatred and sense of marginality?

Lawrence Wright: The internet is certainly a prominent factor. There is-- The word for the Muslim community in Arabic is "oma"[ph?] and there's a virtual oma on the internet and it's far more radical than the real one. Young Muslims get on the internet and it's so dominated by radicalism that you can't get away from the fact that this is a tremendous source for proselytizing and radicalizing young Muslims all over the world.

Dr. Kevin Star: Why are the Arab states, as you suggest, so incompetent in running economies? Why no GNP? Don't we know that Dubai is building an economy and using very imaginative and modern techniques and technology, etc., to create a new economy? Doesn't that move against some of the things you've been suggesting?

Lawrence Wright: I think Dubai is a tremendous example of what the Arab world can do and when they have a more accountable government as they do in the emirates and in Qatar for that matter-- Qatar is a Wahhabi society just like Saudi Arabia but it's far more open and tolerant. It's not a democracy but it has accountability and it has a lower rate of corruption and I think if- Arabs if given the opportunity can succeed and can prosper but it's so striking how few cases that's true.

Dr. Kevin Star: We will now take this final question and I'll condense a number of questions, Mr. Wright. A number of questions refer to the Koran, to the religious conflict. Is there a bridge? Is there a way of the non Muslim world meeting the Muslim world, the larger Muslim world, or is this a clash of civilizations? Is this a battle to the end or can there be a negotiated peace? Can there be understanding?

Lawrence Wright: I do believe there can be or I'd be really pessimistic. The-- What I think that we're talking about is not just religion; it's fundamentalism and in my own tradition, which is Christianity, if you read the Bible you'll see that in Leviticus they- it advocates stoning homosexuals, killing disobedient children. I've considered the latter but-- But those are things we've chosen to ignore. All religions have these things, Judaism for instance. If you read the Torah, many of the passages talk about the law and the law is related to the temple and many orthodox Jews believe that you can't really have Judaism without restoring the temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. If they went there and destroyed the two mosques that are presently there, we would have all-out religious warfare so a lot of Jews have accommodated to the fact that their religion exists outside of this physical place. It's persuading-- Well, I should take that back. I don't think we have a place in telling Muslims what to believe but we do have the right to demand accountability on their part and to demand tolerance for other religious faiths. I think one of the things that could change Islam the most right now is that Saudi Arabia would allow Islam itself to be freely taught once again in Mecca, which is the city for all Muslims. For centuries there are four main schools of Islam and each of these were allowed to freely practice their teachings in the city of- the holy city of Mecca. Now only the Wahhabi strain is permitted to be taught at all. If Saudi Arabia would open up its own religion and let other voices come in, much more tolerant strains of Islam, then I think that we could begin to see some of the moderation that needs to take place in that religion.

Dr. Kevin Star: One final because there's about 13 questions: What should we be doing in Iraq?

Lawrence Wright: I have a proposal and I've been thinking about this a lot. What troubled me in all of this recent debate about what we should do about Iraq is that we're not asking the Iraqi people what we should do. We didn't ask if we could invade them and, to use a Texas expression, it seems tacky to consider withdrawing without asking the Iraqi people what they think, and frankly I think this would have a clarifying effect. Recent polls show that something like 40%- 47% of Iraqis want us out but do they really? Do they really want us out? And well, of course we would long to get out. We're spending \$250 million a day in Iraq. We could have universal health care. We could send our kids to college tuition free. We are capsizing our economy and pouring it in to Iraq. Oh, and don't talk to me about the lives that are being lost there. Surely we do long to leave Iraq but I don't want to leave Iraq without knowing that the Iraqis

want me to go. I don't want history to look back at America and say we abandoned Iraq to chaos, to genocide. So I would like to have the Iraqi people have a plebiscite, go stick your finger in the purple ink and tell us do you want us to stay or do you want us to leave. It would have a great effect in either respect. I think if they tell us to leave, then it's clear the Iraqi people have spoken and we can leave in an orderly manner but if they ask us to stay I think it would also be clarifying for the Iraqi people, many of whom are still fighting against the occupation, that the Iraqi people have spoken and they want us there. And in that way I think that we can kind of come to terms with what they want. Thank you very much.

Dr. Kevin Star: Thank you. On behalf of the World Affairs Council of Northern California, the Marines Memorial Association, and Stacey's Independent Bookstore, I want to thank Mr. Lawrence Wright for sharing his thoughts and insights with us today and thank you, the audience, for your participation. I invite all of you to a reception in our lobby and good evening.

End of Lawrence_Wright – Looming.mp3