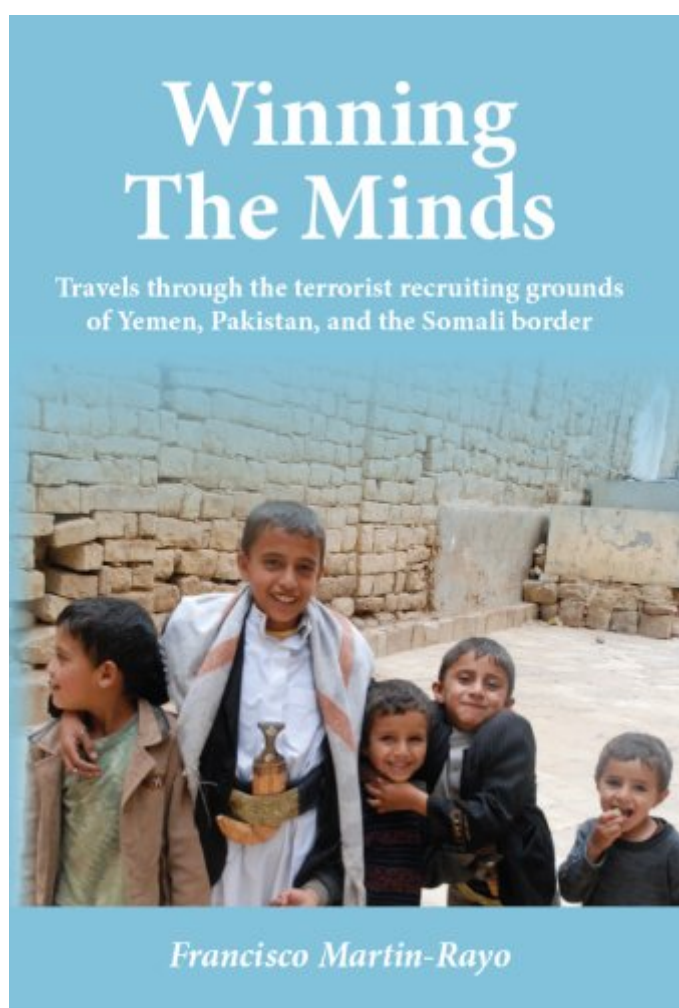


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# Winning The Minds: Travels Through The Terrorist Recruiting Grounds Of Yemen, Pakistan, And The Somali Border



## Synopsis

“Winning The Minds is a thought-provoking analysis rooted in impressive on-the-ground research. A valuable read.” - Graham Allison, Founding Dean of the Harvard Kennedy School and Director of the Belfer Center at Harvard University

The Yemeni intelligence officer was yelling at me now, his moustache bristling with rage as he showered me with flecks of spit. “Enta muhim ma il jehuddi? Enta muhim?!” I tried to translate his words in my head, the fear paralyzing my brain as I begged for a translator. This only seemed to infuriate him even more, as up until this point we had been speaking in Arabic. Muhim | Important. Jehuddi | Jewish. He was asking me if I was important with the Jews. He thought I was Jewish. Another spate of insults and spit followed, and all I caught was Yisrael. He was implying I was a spy for Israel. I gasped as the significance of this accusation hit me. The Yemeni intelligence officers thought they had caught an Israeli spy. If I couldn’t convince him otherwise, I would soon find myself handcuffed naked to a chair while they tortured me for information I didn’t have. How had I ended up here? Less than a year ago I was sitting on the 46th floor of a building in midtown Manhattan, part of the indistinguishable group of young college grads working in finance, and now I was seconds away from disappearing into a Yemeni prison. What turn of events, what decisions, had led me to this moment?

Having left his job as a hedge fund analyst in New York’s financial district to study counter-terrorism at Harvard, Francisco Martin-Rayó’s newly chosen path led to a conversation with a top intelligence official. From that single conversation his life would change in ways he could never imagine—and he would learn a simple truth that might change the world as we know it. Inspired to study terrorist recruitment, Martin-Rayó embarks on a whirlwind journey to the three most fertile refugee camps in the world for terrorist recruiters: Dadaab, Kenya, dominated by al-Shabaab, the most recent al-Qaeda franchisee; the camps around Peshawar, Pakistan, where the Taliban actively recruits fighters; and Kharaz in southern Yemen, right in the middle of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s heartland. Describing the countries’ histories and conflicts as he details his own travels, he provides a fundamental understanding of the regions, cultures, and people he comes into contact with. Along the way his experiences prove to be hilarious, heartbreaking, and gripping, including: his detention by the Yemeni Intelligence Service after being confused for an Israeli spy; meetings with Pakistani intelligence officials who talk about the beginnings of the Taliban movement and how they funded it; drunken nights with Kenyan government officials who admit to recruiting Somali refugee children to fight against al-Qaeda; and a stroll through a desecrated ancient Jewish cemetery in the middle of al-Qaeda territory. Most interesting, however, are the conversations that the author has with refugee children and terrorist recruits. He comes to realize that US policy is deeply flawed and that there is a

key difference between those individuals who join terrorist organizations and those who don't. Part travelogue, part analysis of American counterterrorism policies in the region, Martin-Rayó's groundbreaking treatise is an eye-opening look into the heart of terrorist recruitment. A gripping story reminiscent of Greg Mortenson's bestseller Three Cups of Tea, *Winning the Minds: Travels Through the Terrorist Recruiting Grounds of Yemen, Pakistan, and the Somali Border* is an extraordinary journey that changes the face of counterterrorism policy forever.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I read the book almost at once, as I really enjoyed the travelogue style of the research. The author vividly describes his experience with local people, their hospitality, troubles with local bureaucracy and security organisations. The book gives an glance to the lives of refugees in the camps, work of international aid organisations and expat communities working in them. It is written in a very easy language, therefore, those who are not involved in international development area can easily follow the book. However, the conclusions sound a little bit like an essay of a high school student - couple months of researching a topic does not make one an expert of international relations. Although I agree with authors ideas, these issues are very complex and simple recommendations 'how to

make the world a better place' might not work the way they are expected. Overall, I really enjoyed the book and I congratulate the author on choosing such an interesting research for his studies and having the courage to complete it.

The author recounts his journeys through these countries while researching education among refugee populations. I found his journeys very interesting and his conclusions and research even more so. I hope this book is widely read so those ideas can be widely spread and inspire the right people to work toward these goals. I found it very disturbing what happened to the Jewish cemetery. This is a book well worth reading, very entertaining, and it gives one a lot to think about.

I've been searching high and low for a book that I can just hand to people who say flippant things about people from these cultures. Francisco manages to show the adversity faced by ordinary people, and ordinary is the operative word here. The honest discussion of the issues, the good, the bad and the ugly was extremely refreshing. Thank you, Francisco.

Good primary source

This book is incredible! I couldn't put it down. It's a hilarious, clever account of the author's journey. It is a great read for those who are already well-versed in the regions but also accessible to those who know nothing of the situation. Besides being a captivating narrative, the book ends in practicality by providing insightful suggestions for U.S. foreign policy. I can only hope that people in positions of power will read this book and take into consideration his remarkable perspective.

When I first picked up this book I was expecting another policy book. But the author's first hand account of events, entertaining story telling, and open mindedness makes this book a joy to read while simultaneously providing a new perspective on an issue that is saturated by mile high analysis and speculations. This on the ground account will open your eyes to some of the problems with US Foreign Policy while at the same time laughing as the author gets himself into unexpected situations.

What a fun and easy read! As someone who has never been to any of these crazy places, I didn't know what to expect when I first bought the book. But I found it so interesting! I really like the stories and adventures the author tells along his journey, especially the one about Pakistanis funding the

Taliban. I sped right through it and loved every minute of it!

Good read all the way through. This is how you find out the truth, if you really do the work ? If this is verified as true everyone in the state dept. and the U.N. should be required to read and follow.

Didn't want to stop reading it until the end and wished there was more.

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