

“DECLARATION OF JIHAD AGAINST JEWS AND CRUSADERS”

Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden, leader of al Qaeda and the world's best-known terrorist, was born in Saudi Arabia in 1957 into a large family of wealth and privilege. His father, Muhammad bin Laden, was a self-made billionaire of Yemeni origin whose construction business held a dominant position in the kingdom and who had established close personal relations with the Saudi royal family. Osama grew up in an atmosphere marked by a religious piety rooted in the fundamentalist Wahhabist tradition that is dominant in Saudi Arabia. At seventeen, he entered the Management and Economics School of King Abd al-Aziz University, where he was a somewhat mediocre business student. While at the university, he fell under the influence of two important Islamist religious scholars, Muhammad Qutb, the brother of Sayyid Qutb, and Abdallah Azzam, a Palestinian member of the Muslim Brotherhood who played an important theoretical and practical role in the development of the modern jihadist movement.

There is some question as to whether bin Laden received his diploma or left the university without a degree, but in any event he entered his father's construction empire and successfully managed several businesses, amassing a considerable personal fortune. By 1980, he was drawn to the cause of Afghanistan, where mujahideen, both Afghan and foreign, were fighting the communist-led and Soviet-supported government. He went to the Pakistan border city of Peshawar where he joined his former teacher Azzam in providing facilities and assistance for foreign, mainly Arab, mujahideen—often referred to as the “Afghan Arabs”—going to fight in Afghanistan.

Although there is some disagreement over bin Laden's exact role in the Afghan struggle, it is clear that he funded jihadist activities, personally participated in the fighting around the city of Jalalabad, and used his experience in construction to build bases and training facilities for the mujahideen, including the famous cave complex at Tora Bora. In 1988, with the Soviet defeat and withdrawal looming, bin Laden with several associates founded

al Qaeda as an international jihadist movement. The term means “the base” or “the foundation” in Arabic and was commonly used by foreign volunteers in Afghanistan.

By 1990 bin Laden was back in Saudi Arabia, several months before Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait precipitated the crisis that led to the first Gulf War. Bin Laden volunteered to lead a group of jihadist veterans of the war in Afghanistan, the so-called Afghan Arabs, against Saddam. His offer was refused by the Saudi government, which permitted American and other foreign forces to enter the kingdom. Bin Laden protested against this defilement of the holy land of Islam by the presence of infidel forces. His protests brought him house arrest, and he henceforth became an implacable foe of the Saudi government. Using his family influence to obtain travel documents, bin Laden returned to Afghanistan in 1991 and sought to mediate among the various factions struggling for control after the departure of the Soviets, fearing that that this civil war would have a negative impact on the jihadist movement elsewhere.

Bin Laden’s efforts failed and he left Afghanistan for Sudan where he was offered protection by the military regime headed by a radical Islamist, Hassan al-Turabi. Bin Laden invested heavily in Sudan and involved the leadership of the country in his business ventures. He also arranged for settlement of the Afghan Arab mujahideen who followed him to Sudan and offered them employment. Among these Afghan Arabs was Ayman al Zawahiri, an Egyptian jihadist who had become a close associate of bin Laden by the late 1980s and would emerge as the second most important leader of al Qaeda. In Sudan, bin Laden was involved either directly or indirectly in jihadist activities, including plots to overthrow the Saudi monarchy, attacks on American peacekeepers in Somalia in 1993, the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, and an attempt to assassinate the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in 1994.

By 1994, the Saudi government stripped bin Laden of his citizenship, and the Sudanese government was pressured by the Saudis, the United States and Egypt to expel him and other militants. He left the country in 1996 and returned to Afghanistan, arriving there several months before the Taliban captured Kabul. Bin Laden established a close relationship with the new fundamentalist regime, which provided sanctuary and a base for him to organize his global jihadist activities. He in turn supported the Taliban with funds, as well as managerial and development expertise. It was only at this time that bin Laden achieved widespread notoriety as a leading terrorist. Both the 1998 bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the attack on the *U.S.S. Cole* in Yemen in 2000 were traced to al Qaeda. After the bombings of the American embassies, President Clinton launched a cruise missile attack on one of bin Laden’s bases in Afghanistan in an unsuccessful attempt to kill him.

The American invasion of Afghanistan following 9/11 and the overthrow of the Taliban government deprived bin Laden of his sanctuary. By most accounts, he was almost captured at his Tora Bora cave complex but managed

to slip away. He is presently believed to be somewhere in the mountainous tribal areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan.

Bin Laden’s emergence as the world’s leading terrorist owes much to his personal qualities. He has good managerial and organizational skills and has been willing to use his considerable personal wealth to realize his jihadist goals. His austere lifestyle and willingness to suffer physical privations and the risk of capture and death have earned him the admiration of many Muslims, including those who do not generally support terrorism. Describing bin Laden’s first televised appearance after 9/11, Omar Saghi, a scholar of Islam, has written:

The challenge he posed to America as an ascetic stripped of all worldly goods and hiding out in Afghanistan’s miserable mountains was multiplied by the gaping breach that—as he delighted in emphasizing—separated him from the United States’ predatory opulence.¹

Bin Laden has been described as a brilliant polemicist who effectively uses the media to transmit his message. He has demonstrated a shrewd ability to appeal to and manipulate the hatreds, frustrations, and anger in the Muslim world. His skill in exploiting the media and Al Qaeda’s effective use of technology and modern business techniques point to a frequently observed paradox: Bin Laden promotes a rigid, narrow fundamentalism whose roots are found in the distant past, and yet he and his organization employ modern means to realize this medieval vision.

Bin Laden is not a religious scholar, but he is immersed in Islamic religious traditions. This last point is crucial. His frequent references to passages in the Qur’an and other religious texts to support his jihadist goals have struck a resonant chord in the Muslim world.

Political scientist Robert S. Snyder has characterized bin Laden as a “civilizational revolutionary,” a term that distinguishes him from radicals calling for a revolution within their own country and classic Marxists, who support a global working-class revolution.² According to this interpretation, bin Laden’s revolutionary unit is neither a nation nor a class, but an entire civilization—the Islamic civilization of the Middle East and beyond. Regarding national borders as Western imperialist creations that serve to divide Muslims, he focuses on the *umma*, the world community of Muslims, as his revolutionary unit. And for him a principal symbol of Islamic civilization is the caliphate that he aims to restore, perhaps with the expectation that he would become caliph. Restoration of the caliphate is only a prelude to the reconquest of all lands that were once under Muslim rule. Ultimately bin Laden envisions a future where the entire world will live under Islamic law.

Snyder’s analysis has the advantage of highlighting bin Laden’s opposition to national jihads aimed at a particular country, one whose rulers fundamentalists view as “apostates.” He sought to change the national focus of such groups as Egyptian Islamic Jihad headed by Ayman

al Zawahiri, and ultimately prevailed as Zawahiri merged his group with al Qaeda.

For bin Laden, the United States is the principal target of the global jihad movement. His litany of accusations includes the familiar charges that the United States supports Israel's efforts to crush the Palestinians, that it is killing Muslims in Iraq and represses them elsewhere, and that it defiles the "land of the two holy Mosques" by stationing troops in Saudi Arabia. He also bitterly attacks Jews, who are thought to control the policies of the United States. In response to those jihadists who focus on overturning the regime in a particular Muslim country, bin Laden maintains that corrupt apostate regimes are kept in power by American support; therefore, attacking the "far enemy" is the most effective way of stripping present Muslim rulers of their power and imposing Islamic law in these lands.

By attacking the United States on 9/11, bin Laden hoped to trigger a military response that would radicalize the Muslims of the Middle East against America, leading to the weakening or toppling of moderate, pro-Western Arab regimes and the ascendancy of al Qaeda. With a confidence born of the victory by the mujahideen over the Soviets, he expected that the United States would be trapped in a guerrilla war in Afghanistan and would soon flee in humiliation. He did not anticipate his having to flee Afghanistan; nor did the United States' invasion of that al Qaeda stronghold elicit the violent response in the Muslim world he expected. But it has been argued that the current war in Iraq, a war begun at least in part as a response to the threat of terrorism in a post-9/11 world, has served as an effective recruitment tool for al Qaeda jihadists, while greatly exacerbating anti-American sentiment in the region and weakening moderate Arab governments.

In February 1998, some three-and-a-half years before 9/11, bin Laden formed the World Islamic Front in Afghanistan, and in the Front's name issued a *fatwa*, or religious decree, proclaiming a jihad against "Crusaders and Jews." The five signatories include Ayman al Zawahiri, who by then had become bin Laden's closest associate. The declaration focuses on three charges against the "Judeo-Crusader alliance." First, there is the ongoing "occupation" of Saudi Arabia by American forces, who are accused of defiling this holy land and turning it into a base for attacking neighboring Muslim lands. Second, bin Laden and his colleagues charge the United States with devastating Iraq in a "vicious" war and continuing to inflict suffering on the Iraqi people. (The reference is obviously to America's leadership of the coalition that fought the first Gulf War in 1991 in response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and to the subsequent imposition of sanctions by the UN.) Finally, these actions by the United States serve to distract attention from the continuing occupation of Jerusalem and the "murder" of Muslims by Israel. The declaration, reproduced below, closes with an appeal to all true Muslims "to kill Americans and seize their money wherever they find them." The bombings

of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that same year have been viewed as bin Laden's first step in implementing the principles of this declaration.

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Praise be to God, revealer of the Book, controller of the clouds, defeater of factionalism, who says in His Book: "When the forbidden months are over, wherever you find the polytheists, kill them, seize them, besiege them, ambush them." Prayers and peace be upon our Prophet Muhammad bin Abdallah, who said: "I have been sent with a sword in my hands so that only God may be worshiped, God who placed my livelihood under the shadow of my spear and who condemns those who disobey my orders to servility and humiliation."

Ever since God made the Arabian Peninsula flat, created desert in it and surrounded it with seas, it has never suffered such a calamity as these Crusader hordes that have spread through it like locusts, consuming its wealth and destroying its fertility. All this at a time when nations have joined forces against the Muslims as if fighting over a bowl of food. When the matter is this grave and support is scarce, we must discuss current events and agree collectively on how best to settle the issue.

There is now no longer any debate about three well acknowledged and commonly agreed facts that require no further proof, but we will repeat them so that people remember them. They are as follows:

Firstly, for over seven years America has occupied the holiest parts of the Islamic lands, the Arabian peninsula, plundering its wealth, dictating to its leaders, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbours and turning its bases there into a spearhead with which to fight the neighbouring Muslim peoples. Some might have disputed the reality of this occupation before, but all the people of the Arabian Peninsula have now acknowledged it. There is no clearer proof than America's excessive aggression against the people of Iraq, using the Peninsula as a base. It is true that all its leaders have rejected such use of their lands, but they are powerless.

Secondly, despite the great devastation inflicted upon the Iraqi people at the hands of the Judeo-Crusader alliance, and despite the terrible number of deaths—over one million—despite all this, the Americans are trying to repeat these horrific massacres again, as if they are not satisfied with the long period of sanctions after the vicious war, or with all the fragmentation and destruction.

Today they come to annihilate what is left of this people and humiliate their Muslim neighbours.

Thirdly, while these wars are being waged by the Americans for religious and economic purposes, they also serve the interests of the petty Jewish state, diverting attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and its murder of Muslims there. There is no better proof of this than their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighbouring Arab state, and their efforts to

fragment all the states in the region, like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan, into paper mini-states whose weakness and disunity will guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal Crusader occupation of the Peninsula.

All these American crimes and sins are a clear proclamation of war against God, his Messenger, and the Muslims. Religious scholars throughout Islamic history have agreed that jihad is an individual duty when an enemy attacks Muslim countries. This was related by the Imam ibn Qudama in "The Resource," by Imam al-Kisa'i in "The Marvels," by al-Qurtubi in his exegesis, and by the Sheikh of Islam when he states in his chronicles that "As for fighting to repel an enemy, which is the strongest way to defend freedom and religion, it is agreed that this is a duty. After faith, there is no greater duty than fighting an enemy who is corrupting religion and the world."

On this basis, and in accordance with God's will, we pronounce to all Muslims the following judgment: To kill the American and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim in all countries, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Holy Mosque [in Mecca] from their grip, so that their armies leave all the territory of Islam, defeated, broken, and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of God Almighty: "Fight the idolaters at any time, if they first fight you;" "Fight them until there is no more persecution and until worship is devoted to God;" "Why should you not fight in God's cause and for those oppressed men, women, and children who cry out: 'Lord, rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors! By Your grace, give us a protector and a helper!'"

With God's permission we call on everyone who believes in God and wants reward to comply with His will to kill the Americans and seize their money wherever and whenever they find them. We also call on the religious scholars, their leaders, their youth, and their soldiers, to launch the raid on the soldiers of Satan, the Americans, and whichever devil's supporters are allied with them, to rout those behind them so that they will not forget it.

God Almighty said: "Believers, respond to God and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life. Know that God comes between a man and his heart, and that you will be gathered to Him."

God Almighty said: "Believers, why, when it is said to you, 'Go and fight in God's way,' do you dig your heels into the earth? Do you prefer this world to the life to come? How small the enjoyment of this world is, compared with the life to come! If you do not go out and fight, God will punish you severely and put others in your place, but you cannot harm Him in any way: God has power over all things."

God Almighty also said: "Do not lose heart or despair—if you are true believers you will have the upper hand."

NOTES

1. Quoted in Malise Ruthven, "The Rise of Muslim Terrorists," *The New York Review of Books* (May 29, 2008), p. 33.
2. Robert S. Snyder, "Hating America: Bin Laden as a Civilizational Revolutionary," *Review of Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Fall 2003), 325–349.