

Interview with Osama bin Laden

May 1998

[Please note: Images may have been removed from this document. Page numbers have been added.]

In the first part of this interview which occurred in May 1998, a little over two months before the U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, Osama bin Laden answers questions posed to him by some of his followers at his mountaintop camp in southern Afghanistan. In the latter part of the interview, ABC reporter John Miller is asking the questions.

... What is the meaning of your call for Muslims to take arms against America in particular, and what is the message that you wish to send to the West in general?

The call to wage war against America was made because America has spear-headed the crusade against the Islamic nation, sending tens of thousands of its troops to the land of the two Holy Mosques over and above its meddling in its affairs and its politics, and its support of the oppressive, corrupt and tyrannical regime that is in control. These are the reasons behind the singling out of America as a target. And not exempt of responsibility are those Western regimes whose presence in the region offers support to the American troops there. We know at least one reason behind the symbolic participation of the Western forces and that is to support the Jewish and Zionist plans for expansion of what is called the Great Israel. Surely, their presence is not out of concern over their interests in the region. ... Their presence has no meaning save one and that is to offer support to the Jews in Palestine who are in need of their Christian brothers to achieve full control over the Arab Peninsula which they intend to make an important part of the so called Greater Israel. ...

Many of the Arabic as well as the Western mass media accuse you of terrorism and of supporting terrorism. What do you have to say to that?

There is an Arabic proverb that says "she accused me of having her malady, then snuck away." Besides, terrorism can be commendable and it can be reprehensible. Terrifying an innocent person and terrorizing him is objectionable and unjust, also unjustly terrorizing people is not right.

Whereas, terrorizing oppressors and criminals and thieves and robbers is necessary for the safety of people and for the protection of their property. There is no doubt in this. Every state and every civilization and culture has to resort to terrorism under certain circumstances for the purpose of abolishing tyranny and corruption. Every country in the world has its own security system and its own security forces, its own police and its own army. They are all designed to terrorize whoever even contemplates to attack that country or its citizens. The terrorism we practice is of the commendable kind for it is directed at the tyrants and the aggressors and the enemies of Allah, the tyrants, the traitors who commit acts of treason against their own countries and their own faith and their own prophet and their own nation. Terrorizing those and punishing them are necessary measures to straighten things and to make them right. Tyrants and oppressors who subject the Arab nation to aggression ought to be punished. The wrongs and the crimes committed against the Muslim nation are far greater than can be covered by this interview. America heads the list of aggressors against Muslims. The recurrence of aggression against Muslims everywhere is proof enough. For over half a century, Muslims in Palestine have been slaughtered and assaulted and robbed of their honor and of their property. Their houses have been blasted, their crops destroyed. And the strange thing is that any act on their part to

avenge themselves or to lift the injustice befalling them causes great agitation in the United Nations which hastens to call for an emergency meeting only to convict the victim and to censure the wronged and the tyrannized whose children have been killed and whose crops have been destroyed and whose farms have been pulverized. ...

In today's wars, there are no morals, and it is clear that mankind has descended to the lowest degrees of decadence and oppression. They rip us of our wealth and of our resources and of our oil. Our religion is under attack. They kill and murder our brothers. They compromise our honor and our dignity and dare we utter a single word of protest against the injustice, we are called terrorists. This is compounded injustice. And the United Nations insistence to convict the victims and support the aggressors constitutes a serious precedence which shows the extent of injustice that has been allowed to take root in this land. ...

What is your relationship with the Islamic movements in various regions of the world like Chechnya and Kashmir and other Arab countries?

Cooperation for the sake of truth and righteousness is demanded from Muslims. A Muslim should do his utmost to cooperate with his fellow Muslims. But Allah says of cooperation that it is not absolute for there is cooperation to do good, and there is cooperation to commit aggression and act unjustly. A Muslim is supposed to give his fellow Muslim guidance and support. He (Allah) said "Stand by your brother be he oppressor or oppressed." When asked how were they to stand by him if he were the oppressor, He answered them, saying "by giving him guidance and counsel." It all goes to say that Muslims should cooperate with one another and should be supportive of one another, and they should promote righteousness and mercy. They should all unite in the fight against polytheism and they should pool all their resources and their energy to fight the Americans and the Zionists and those with them. They should, however, avoid side fronts and rise over the small problems for these are less detrimental. Their fight should be directed against unbelief and unbelievers. ...

We heard your message to the American government and later your message to the European governments who participated in the occupation of the Gulf. Is it possible for you to address the people of these countries?

As we have already said, our call is the call of Islam that was revealed to Mohammed. It is a call to all mankind. We have been entrusted with good cause to follow in the footsteps of the Messenger and to communicate his message to all nations. It is an invitation that we extend to all the nations to embrace Islam, the religion that calls for justice, mercy and fraternity among all nations, not differentiating between black and white or between red and yellow except with respect to their devotedness. All people who worship Allah, not each other, are equal before Him. We are entrusted to spread this message and to extend that call to all the people. We, nonetheless, fight against their governments and all those who approve of the injustice they practice against us. We fight the governments that are bent on attacking our religion and on stealing our wealth and on hurting our feelings. And as I have mentioned before, we fight them, and those who are part of their rule are judged in the same manner. ...

In your last statement, there was a strong message to the American government in particular. What message do you have for the European governments and the West in general?

Praise be Allah and prayers and peace upon Mohammed. With respect to the Western governments that participated in the attack on the land of the two Holy Mosques regarding it as ownerless, and in the siege against the Muslim people of Iraq, we have nothing new to add to the previous message. What prompted us to address the American government in particular is the fact that it is on the head of the Western and the crusading forces in their fight against Islam and against Muslims. The two explosions that took place in Riyadh and in Khobar recently were but a clear and powerful signal to the governments of the countries which willingly participated in the aggression against our countries and our lives and our sacrosanct symbols. It might be beneficial to mention that some of those countries have begun to move towards independence from the American government with respect to the enmity that it continues to show towards the Muslim people. We only hope that they will continue to move in that direction, away from the oppressive forces that are fighting against our countries. We however, differentiate between the western government and the people of the West. If the people have elected those governments in the latest elections, it is because they have fallen prey to the Western media which portray things contrary to what they really are. And while the slogans raised by those regimes call for humanity, justice, and peace, the behavior of their governments is completely the opposite. It is not enough for their people to show pain when they see our children being killed in Israeli raids launched by American planes, nor does this serve the purpose. What they ought to do is change their governments which attack our countries. The hostility that America continues to express against the Muslim people has given rise to feelings of animosity on the part of Muslims against America and against the West in general. Those feelings of animosity have produced a change in the behavior of some crushed and subdued groups who, instead of fighting the Americans inside the Muslim countries, went on to fight them inside the United States of America itself.

The Western regimes and the government of the United States of America bear the blame for what might happen. If their people do not wish to be harmed inside their very own countries, they should seek to elect governments that are truly representative of them and that can protect their interests. ...

The enmity between us and the Jews goes far back in time and is deep rooted. There is no question that war between the two of us is inevitable. For this reason it is not in the interest of Western governments to expose the interests of their people to all kinds of retaliation for almost nothing. It is hoped that people of those countries will initiate a positive move and force their governments not to act on behalf of other states and other sects. This is what we have to say and we pray to Allah to preserve the nation of Islam and to help them drive their enemies out of their land.

American politicians have painted a distorted picture of Islam, of Muslims and of Islamic fighters. We would like you to give us the true picture that clarifies your viewpoint

The leaders in America and in other countries as well have fallen victim to Jewish Zionist blackmail. They have mobilized their people against Islam and against Muslims. These are portrayed in such a manner as to drive people to rally against them. The truth is that the whole Muslim world is the victim of international terrorism, engineered by America at the United Nations. We are a nation whose sacred symbols have been looted and whose wealth and resources have been plundered. It is normal for us to react against the forces that invade our land and occupy it

Quite a number of Muslim countries have seen the rise of militant movements

whose purpose is to stand up in the face of the pressure exerted on the people by their own governments and other governments. Such as is the case in Egypt and Libya and North Africa and Algiers and such as was the case in Syria and in Yemen. There are also other militant groups currently engaged in the fight against the unbelievers and the crusaders as is the case in Kashmir and Chechnya and Bosnia and the African horn. Is there any message you wish to convey to our brothers who are fighting in various parts of the Islamic World?

... Tell the Muslims everywhere that the vanguards of the warriors who are fighting the enemies of Islam belong to them and the young fighters are their sons. Tell them that the nation is bent on fighting the enemies of Islam. Once again, I have to stress the necessity of focusing on the Americans and the Jews for they represent the spearhead with which the members of our religion have been slaughtered. Any effort directed against America and the Jews yields positive and direct results - Allah willing. It is far better for anyone to kill a single American soldier than to squander his efforts on other activities. ...

You come from a background of wealth and comfort to end up fighting on the front lines. Many Americans find that unusual.

This is difficult to understand, especially for him who does not understand the religion of Islam. In our religion, we believe that Allah has created us for the purpose of worshipping him. He is the one who has created us and who has favored us with this religion. Allah has ordered us to make holy wars and to fight to see to it that His word is the highest and the uppermost and that of the unbelievers the lowermost. We believe that this is the call we have to answer regardless of our financial capabilities.

This too answers the claims of the West and of the secular people in the Arab world. They claim that this blessed awakening and the people reverting to Islam are due to economic factors. This is not so. It is rather a grace from Allah, a desire to embrace the religion of Allah. And this is not surprising. When the holy war called, thousands of young men from the Arab Peninsula and other countries answered the call and they came from wealthy backgrounds. Hundreds of them were killed in Afghanistan and in Bosnia and in Chechnya.

You have been described as the world's most wanted man, and there is word that the American government intends to put a price on your head - in the millions - when you are captured. Do you think they will do that? And does it bother you?

We do not care what the Americans believe. What we care for is to please Allah. Americans heap accusations on whoever stands for his religion or his rights or his wealth. ... It does not scare us that they have put a price on my head. We as Muslims believe that our years on this earth are finite and predetermined. If the whole world gets together to kill us before it is our time to go, they will not succeed. We also believe that livelihoods are preordained. So no matter how much pressure American puts on the regime in Riyadh to freeze our assets and to forbid people from contributing to this great cause, we shall still have Allah to take care of us; livelihood is sent by Allah; we shall not want. ...

Mr. bin Laden, you have issued a fatwah calling on Muslims to kill Americans

where they can, when they can. Is that directed at all Americans, just the American military, just the Americans in Saudi Arabia?

Allah has ordered us to glorify the truth and to defend Muslim land, especially the Arab peninsula ... against the unbelievers. After World War II, the Americans grew more unfair and more oppressive towards people in general and Muslims in particular. ... The Americans started it and retaliation and punishment should be carried out following the principle of reciprocity, especially when women and children are involved. Through history, American has not been known to differentiate between the military and the civilians or between men and women or adults and children. Those who threw atomic bombs and used the weapons of mass destruction against Nagasaki and Hiroshima were the Americans. Can the bombs differentiate between military and women and infants and children? America has no religion that can deter her from exterminating whole peoples. Your position against Muslims in Palestine is despicable and disgraceful. America has no shame. ... We believe that the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans. Nothing could stop you except perhaps retaliation in kind. We do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets, and this is what the fatwah says The fatwah is general (comprehensive) and it includes all those who participate in, or help the Jewish occupiers in killing Muslims.

Ramzi Yousef was a follower of yours. Do you remember him and did you know him?

After the explosion that took place in the World Trade Center, Ramzi Yousef became a well known Muslim figure. Muslims have come to know him. Unfortunately, I did not know him before this incident. I of course remember who he is. He is a Muslim who wanted to protect his religion jealously from the oppression practiced by America against Islam. He acted with zeal to make the Americans understand that their government was attacking Muslims in order to safeguard the American-Jewish interests. ...

Wali Khan Amin Shah was captured in Manila. American authorities believe he was working for you, funded by you, setting up training camps there and part of his plan was to plan out the assassination or the attempted assassination of President Clinton during his trip to Manila.

Wali Khan is a Muslim young man; his nickname in Afghanistan was the Lion. He was among the most courageous Muslim young men. He was a close friend and we used to fight from the same trenches in Afghanistan. We fought many battles against the Russians until they were defeated and put to shame and had to leave the country in disgrace. As to what you said about him working for me, I have nothing to say. We are all together in this; we all work for Allah and our reward comes from him. As to what you said about the attempt to assassinate President Clinton, it is not surprising. What do you expect from people attacked by Clinton, whose sons and mothers have been killed by Clinton? Do you expect anything but treatment by reciprocity?

The federal government in the US. is still investigating their suspicions that you ordered and funded the attack on the US military in Al Khobar and Riyadh.

We have roused the nation and the Muslim people and we have communicated to them the fatwahs of our learned scholars who the Saudi government has thrown in jail in order to please

the American government for which they are agents. ... We have communicated their fatwabs and stirred the nation to drive out the enemy who has occupied our land and usurped our country and suppressed our people and to rid the land of the two Holy Mosques from their presence. Among the young men who responded to our call are Khalid Al Said and Abdul Azeez Al... and Mahmud Al Hadi and Muslih Al Shamrani. We hope Allah receives them as holy martyrs. They have raised the nation's head high and washed away a great part of the shame that has enveloped us as a result of the weakness of the Saudi government and its complicity with the American government Yes, we have instigated and they have responded. We hope Allah grants their families solace.

You've been painted in America as a terrorist leader. To your followers, you are a hero. How do you see yourself?

As I have said, we are not interested in what America says. We do not care. We view ourselves and our brothers like everyone else. Allah created us to worship Him and to follow in his footsteps and to be guided by His Book. I am one of the servants of Allah and I obey his orders. Among those is the order to fight for the word of Allah ... and to fight until the Americans are driven out of all the Islamic countries.

No one expected the mujahedeen to beat the Russians in Afghanistan. It came as a surprise to everyone. What do you see as the future of American involvement in the Middle East, in taking on groups like this?

... Allah has granted the Muslim people and the Afghani mujahedeen, and those with them, the opportunity to fight the Russians and the Soviet Union. ... They were defeated by Allah and were wiped out. There is a lesson here. The Soviet Union entered Afghanistan late in December of '79. The flag of the Soviet Union was folded once and for all on the 25th of December just 10 years later. It was thrown in the waste basket. Gone was the Soviet union forever. We are certain that we shall - with the grace of Allah - prevail over the Americans and over the Jews, as the Messenger of Allah promised us in an authentic prophetic tradition when He said the Hour of Resurrection shall not come before Muslims fight Jews and before Jews hide behind trees and behind rocks.

We are certain - with the grace of Allah - that we shall prevail over the Jews and over those fighting with them. Today however, our battle against the Americans is far greater than our battle was against the Russians. Americans have committed unprecedented stupidity. They have attacked Islam and its most significant sacrosanct symbols We anticipate a black future for America. Instead of remaining United States, it shall end up separated states and shall have to carry the bodies of its sons back to America.

What do you see as the future of the Saudi royal family and their involvement with America and the US military?

History has the answer to your question. The fate of any government which sells the interests of its own people and, betrays the nation and commits offenses which furnish grounds for expulsion from Islam, is known. We expect for the ruler of Riyadh the same fate as the Shah of Iran. We anticipate this to happen to him and to the influential people who stand by him and who have sided with the Jews and the Christians giving them free reign over the land of the two

Holy Mosques. These are grave offenses that are grounds for expulsion from the faith. They shall all be wiped out. ...

Describe the situation when your men took down the American forces in Somalia.

After our victory in Afghanistan and the defeat of the oppressors who had killed millions of Muslims, the legend about the invincibility of the superpowers vanished. Our boys no longer viewed America as a superpower. So, when they left Afghanistan, they went to Somalia and prepared themselves carefully for a long war. They had thought that the Americans were like the Russians, so they trained and prepared. They were stunned when they discovered how low was the morale of the American soldier. America had entered with 30,000 soldiers in addition to thousands of soldiers from different countries in the world. ... As I said, our boys were shocked by the low morale of the American soldier and they realized that the American soldier was just a paper tiger. He was unable to endure the strikes that were dealt to his army, so he fled, and America had to stop all its bragging and all that noise it was making in the press after the Gulf War in which it destroyed the infrastructure and the milk and dairy industry that was vital for the infants and the children and the civilians and blew up dams which were necessary for the crops people grew to feed their families. Proud of this destruction, America assumed the titles of world leader and master of the new world order. After a few blows, it forgot all about those titles and rushed out of Somalia in shame and disgrace, dragging the bodies of its soldiers. America stopped calling itself world leader and master of the new world order, and its politicians realized that those titles were too big for them and that they were unworthy of them. I was in Sudan when this happened. I was very happy to learn of that great defeat that America suffered, so was every Muslim. ...

Many Americans believe that fighting army to army like what happened in Afghanistan is heroic for either army. But sending off bombs, killing civilians like in the World Trade Center is terrorism.

... After our victory over the Russians in Afghanistan, the international and the American mass media conducted fierce campaigns against us They called us terrorists even before the mujahedeen had committed any act of terrorism against the real terrorists who are the Americans. On the other hand, we say that American politics and their religion do not believe in differentiating between civilians and military, between infants and animals, or among any human groups. ...

Our mothers and daughters and sons are slaughtered every day with the approval of America and its support. And, while America blocks the entry of weapons into Islamic countries, it provides the Israelis with a continuous supply of arms allowing them thus to kill and massacre more Muslims. Your religion does not forbid you from committing such acts, so you have no right to object to any response or retaliation that reciprocates your own actions. But, and in spite of this, our retaliation is directed primarily against the soldiers only and against those standing by them. Our religion forbids us from killing innocent people such as women and children. This, however, does not apply to women fighters. A woman who puts herself in the same trench with men, gets what they get. ...

The American people, by and large, do not know the name bin Laden, but they soon likely will. Do you have a message for the American people?

I say to them that they have put themselves at the mercy of a disloyal government, and this is most evident in Clinton's administration We believe that this administration represents Israel inside America. Take the sensitive ministries such as the Ministry of Exterior and the Ministry of Defense and the CIA, you will find that the Jews have the upper hand in them. They make use of America to further their plans for the world, especially the Islamic world. American presence in the Gulf provides support to the Jews and protects their rear. And while millions of Americans are homeless and destitute and live in abject poverty, their government is busy occupying our land and building new settlements and helping Israel build new settlements in the point of departure for our Prophet's midnight journey to the seven heavens. America throws her own sons in the land of the two Holy Mosques for the sake of protecting Jewish interests. ...

The American government is leading the country towards hell. ... We say to the Americans as people and to American mothers, if they cherish their lives and if they cherish their sons, they must elect an American patriotic government that caters to their interests not the interests of the Jews. If the present injustice continues with the wave of national consciousness, it will inevitably move the battle to American soil, just as Ramzi Yousef and others have done. This is my message to the American people. I urge them to find a serious administration that acts in their interest and does not attack people and violate their honor and pilfer their wealth. ...

In America, we have a figure from history from 1897 named Teddy Roosevelt. He was a wealthy man, who grew up in a privileged situation and who fought on the front lines. He put together his own men - hand chose them - and went to battle. You are like the Middle East version of Teddy Roosevelt.

I am one of the servants of Allah. We do our duty of fighting for the sake of the religion of Allah. It is also our duty to send a call to all the people of the world to enjoy this great light and to embrace Islam and experience the happiness in Islam. Our primary mission is nothing but the furthering of this religion. ... Let not the West be taken in by those who say that Muslims choose nothing but slaughtering. Their brothers in East Europe, in Turkey and in Albania have been guided by Allah to submit to Islam and to experience the bliss of Islam. Unlike those, the European and the American people and some of the Arabs are under the influence of Jewish media. ...