

Bin Ladin preface to letter calling for unity of Muslims

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

On Sunday 19 January 2003, the London-based Arabic newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat published an article containing extracts from a previously unknown letter allegedly written in part by Usama bin Ladin. The 26-page letter was entitled “Islamic work between proponents of union and advocates of conflict” (al-’amal al-islami bayna dawa’i al-ijtima’ wa du at al-niza’). Bin Ladin himself was said to have written the introduction and to have signed the letter. The newspaper received the statement on 18 January by mail from an Islamic source in London with close links to the “Islamic Research and Study Centre” (markaz al-dirasat wa’l-buhuth al-islamiyya). The same London-based sources said the letter had been written “just a few weeks previously”. According to the Associated Press, the statement was not immediately published on radical islamist websites, as normally happens with such statements. Indeed, in the archive of the radical islamist discussion forum al-Qal’a, one finds the first reference to the letter on 21 January, in a posting which quotes an article from CNN in Arabic.

Because the document itself has not been made publicly available, it is difficult to assess the authenticity of the text and of bin Ladin’s alleged authorship of the introduction. No western security officials commented on the authenticity of the letter. It is nevertheless not impossible that Bin Ladin has participated in its publication. However, the name of the main author is not specified at any point in the newspaper article, and it is extremely difficult to determine without any further evidence. Most articles posted on the website of the “Islamic Research and Study Centre” between 2001 and 2003 had no named author. In recent years the names of some of the website’s most prominent writers have been disclosed, notably the Saudi militant Yusuf al-Ayiri. However, the main author of “Islamic work between proponents of union and advocates of conflict” remains unknown.

It has not been possible to retrieve the full text of the original letter, so we can only produce a translation of the quotations which appear in the al-Sharq al-Awsat article:

“Bin Ladin says [...]: ‘What calls for astonishment and causes perplexion is that which any Muslim can observe today, namely the vast number of differences and divisions between Muslims generally and between those working for Islam especially, to the extent that this dangerous phenomenon (i.e. the disagreements) has almost become the only thing on which the different islamist factions in the field agree.’

Bin Ladin adds [...]: ‘The importance of the letter lies not only in its content, but also in its origin, for the letter is published from within the depth of the jihadist current, inside the blessed Islamic awakening. It (the letter) is an expression of a broad section within this current, which has been and still is described as one of the strongest islamist currents in terms of its selfconfidence on disputed issues.’

He clarifies: ‘If a feeling of the danger of division and difference and of the need for unity and agreement has led this party, which is so important in the matter, to propose it (the letter) in this inclusive and unifying framework, then it should lead the rest of the parties to deal favourably with this initiative from the outset.’

The leader of ‘al-Qaida’ says: ‘The letter which we present today is part of praiseworthy efforts which fill an important gap in this area. The letter has brought out the most important evidence

from the Book, the Sunna and the sayings of the scholars of the Islamic nation, on the necessity of unity and consensus, on the rejection of division and conflict, and on the focus on the evil and harm of differences of opinion.' [...]

Bin Ladin's letter says: 'Despite what Islam and its people are suffering at the hands of their enemies, be they secularist movements, tyrannic governments and infidel nations, and despite the wounds from which the Islamic nation is suffering, particularly the desecration and occupation of its sanctities, and [despite] what has befallen it [i.e. Islam] in terms of occupation of territory and violation of its honour at the hands of the world alliance of Jews and Crusaders; despite all this and all that, Muslims are still drowning in furious debates and heated arguments, and in questions and issues which are not considered principles of religion nor points of consensus, and on which no conflict is appropriate.'

The letter addresses secularists, saying: 'Evil tongues are often pointed at the proselytists and scholars and students of religion who have proudly raised their heads in truth, at a time when the heads of the soft people incline to the storm of falsehood, and when belief in Truth is softening and fragmenting against enticement and intimidation. The evil tongues which are pointed to the scholars are often the very same which praise and glorify the behaviour of the enemies of Islam and Muslims, from among the tyrants and others who have declared war on God and fought His allies and allied with His enemies.'

[...]

The letter adds: 'The most important thing is not is one's errors but in a person's surplus of good deeds and piety. A person's standing is not reduced by an accidental error, which no fallible person may avoid.'. [...]

'The situation which Muslims are living today justifies the mobilization of anyone who belongs to this religion, and the application of his energies and efforts in the battle which Islam is waging against the Crusader alliance which has bared its teeth and disclosed its real aims in its fight against Islam and Muslims, and which no longer contents itself with what its agents in the region do.'"