

The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader

Peter L. Bergen (2006)

[Bergen] Is [bin Laden] attacking the United States because of its freedoms or its foreign policies? (xxvii)

[Bergen] He has never . . . expressed an interest in attacking the West because of our "freedoms." (xxvii)

[Brian Fyfield-Shayler, British teacher of the young bin Laden] All the sons are very good looking and they are quite striking. I don't think that I have ever met any ugly Bin Ladens. Osama's mother, I am told, she was a great beauty. (3)

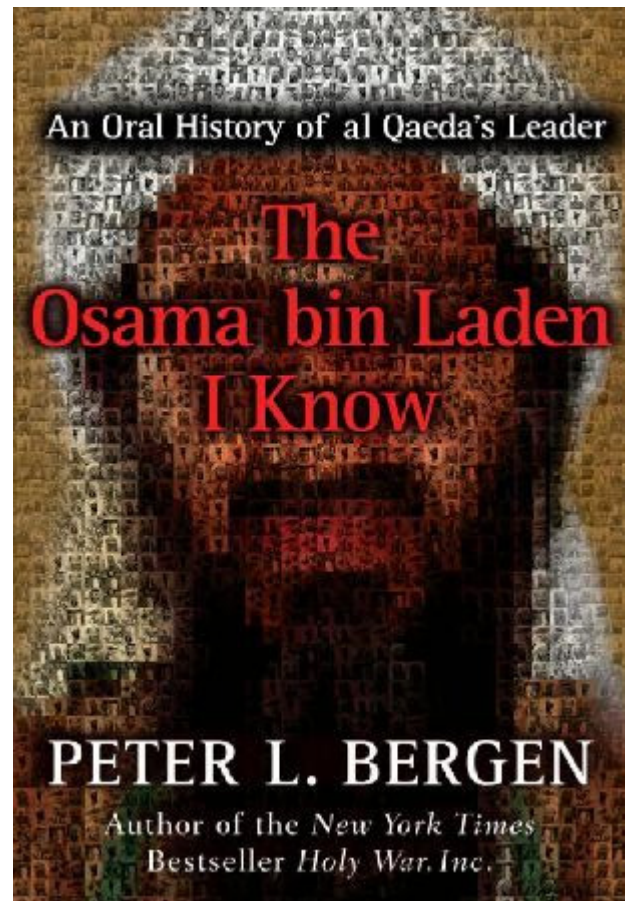
[Jamal Ismail, Pakistani journalist] I knew from the beginning that [bin Laden] was not willing to drink any soft drinks from American companies, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Sprite, 7-Up. He was trying to boycott all American products because he believed that without Americans, Israel cannot exist. (39)

[Khawla Bint al Azoor, female Afghan war recruiter] I urge you, oh young men, to undertake Jihad and martyr yourselves beside your Afghan brothers who are fighting against oppression. I only wish I could give my life and my spirit as a gift to this pure land as a martyr. But I am a girl and not able to do anything. (43)

[A bin Laden relative] Salem had little to do with Bakr [who became the head of the family after Salem's plane crash]. They were like chalk and cheese. Bakr is a crossing the t's and dotting the i's kind of guy. Bakr and another brother Yahia called the shots for the family company after Salem's death.

If Salem had still been around no one would be writing books about Osama bin Laden. Salem had a volcanic temper and had no problem about rocking the boat. He would have personally flown to Sudan [where bin Laden lived in the mid-'90s]. Salem would have grabbed Osama by the lapels and taken him back to Saudi Arabia. (73)

[Steve McCurry, American photographer] I first went to Afghanistan in '79, and had been in probably a dozen times up to that point and always felt very much at home. The Afghans are really friendly people, and I could basically just kind of walk around with one person, even unarmed. For the [Arabs] to come in and act as though this was their war, their country, and they were treating the Afghans like they were just these sort of uneducated, uncouth, illiterate sort of bumpkins [who] didn't really get it. These guys, they're really, really nasty and very aggressive



and very condescending, and just hateful. And the Afghans, actually it was their country being basically slowly destroyed, and they were often very good-humored. (89)

[Noman Benotman] We stayed there for a long time, months and months. In certain areas, the frontline between us and the enemy—it's just 100 meters. And we shoot each other. The Communists; not easy to beat them. My God. It was a huge army! They are thousands and thousands of people, and tanks.

The Arabs [went there] to die. The Afghans, they are there to get their country back. That is the difference. We want to die there. We don't want to come back. So if you need, like, a very hardcore fight in certain places or to do something very stupid. [then you asked the Arabs to do it].

It's something very interesting you know, fantastic. I liked it. (99)

[Bergen] Ali Mohamed was a key trainer for at Qaeda, despite the fact that he was enrolled in the U.S. Army from 1986 to 1989 and was married to an American. Extracts from Mohamed's U.S. military record follow. The record indicates the range of training and skills Ali Mohamed could pass on to at Qaeda's recruits. (103)

[Bergen] The relationship, or lack thereof, between bin Laden and Saddam Hussein has long been a matter of debate. Yet it's clear from these accounts of what bin Laden was saying around the time of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 that al Qaeda's leader has long been an opponent of the Iraqi dictator. (111)

[Bergen] The Saudi government's decision to allow the introduction of some 500,000 U.S. troops into Saudi Arabia in the summer of 1990 was a defining moment for bin Laden. In the late eighties bin Laden had instructed Arab militants living in Pakistan and Afghanistan to avoid criticism of members of the Saud royal family. In the early 1990s he would turn against the royal family, partly because of its corruption, but primarily because of its decision to rely on non-Muslims to defend the holy land of Arabia. (113)

[Paulo Jose de Almeida Santos, a Portuguese convert to Islam and an early al Qaeda recruit] I was capable of making explosives from a pile of aspirins. The science is in knowing how to separate acids and then mix them with other substances. I also learned how to make explosives with the mercury of thermometers. I even managed to make nitroglycerine, the handling of which is very dangerous. Very often as a result of copies of manuals intended for the American Green Berets! (U.S. Special Forces manuals (provided to al Qaeda by its main military trainer, the Egyptian-American Ali Mohamed, who was a U.S. army sergeant at Fort Bragg, South Carolina, the headquarters of the Green Berets between 1986 and 1989.) (117)

[Santos] He was an extraordinarily humble person. He was not the typical Arab who has photographs of himself everywhere. I think he desires only one thing and that is martyrdom. (118)

[Santos] I asked him, "If a woman were to be near the king, and I were to use a bomb or a weapon that could injure or kill the person next to him, would I be allowed to continue?" The answer was: "If it were the king's wife, she shares with the king the same responsibilities; she may, therefore be eliminated." Then I asked: "And if it happened to be a grandson of the king, a child?" Bin Laden said "No, no, in no way!" He became angry: "What are you saying? We are Muslims, we do not eliminate children!" Bin Laden said that if a child was [present during the assassination attempt] you could not attack the king. He would rather have the king return and have a civil war than to kill a child."

Bin Laden once said that any adult Israeli citizen, man or woman, could be assassinated. Because [Israeli] women could also serve in the army. There was an American there who asked: "But the Americans are also our enemies, so can we eliminate American civilians?" Bin Laden

answered: "No. The American government is one thing, the majority of Americans don't even vote, they are totally apathetic." (119)

[Essam al Ridi, Egyptian pilot] I had limited options, one of which was a military aircraft under the designation of T389 which is the equivalent of a civilian aircraft called Saber-40. [The airplane was in storage, what we call "boneyard" in Tucson, Arizona.](#) So we pulled the aircraft out of the storage and we had to go through certain checks mechanically to make it acceptable by the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. [I spent] about a total of 230 thousand dollars. I refurbished it completely, (130-1)

[Jamal al Fadl] After Iraq government took Kuwait (in 1990, following which 500,000 U.S. troops were posted to Saudi Arabia). After few months, they say American army now; they should leave the Gulf area. I hear from Abu Abdallah, Osama bin Laden himself: we cannot let the American army stay in the Gulf area and take our oil, take our money and we have to do something to take them out. We have to fight them. (137)

[Abu Jandal] Al Qaeda viewed the entry of the Americans into Somalia not as a move that is meant to save the Somalis from [famine], but to control Somalia and then spread U.S. hegemony over the region. (138)

[Ali Mohamed, a U.S. citizen of Egyptian origin] In late 1993, I was asked by bin Laden to conduct surveillance of American, British, French and Israeli targets in Nairobi. Among the targets I did surveillance for was the American Embassy. These targets were selected to retaliate against the United States for its involvement in Somalia. I later went to Khartoum, where my surveillance files and photographs were reviewed by Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden looked at the picture of the American Embassy and pointed to where a truck could go as a suicide bomber. (143)

[Ali Mohamed] And the objective of all this, just to attack any Western target in the Middle East, to force Western countries to pull out from the Middle East, based on the Marine [barracks explosion in Beirut [in 1983]]. (143-4)

[FBI interview of Ramzi Yousef, who masterminded the first World Trade Center bombing, in 1993] Yousef stated the reason for the bombings was because of the U.S. military, financial and political support of Israel. Yousef talked at length about Israel being an illegal state and that Israel is committing criminal acts against Muslims. Yousef stated that the American people would need to convince Washington of changing Israeli policy and this would happen by bombing various locations in the U.S. Yousef stated that he was most affected by a BBC report, where Israeli soldiers broke the hand of a Palestinian using a rock. Yousef stated he has no personal agenda with the U.S., only the U.S.-Israeli policy. (145)

[Ramzi Yousef] Yousef stated that during World War II the U.S. dropped nuclear bombs on Japan to force Japan to surrender. Yousef advised the same logic applies to him setting off explosive devices at U.S. targets to force the U. S. to change their policy toward Israel. (145)

[Ramzi Yousef] I believe that this movement, is entitled to strike U.S. targets because the United States is a partner in the crimes committed in Palestine, considering that it finances these crimes and supports them with weapons. The movement is also entitled because this money is taken from taxes paid by Americans. Logically and legally, this makes the American people responsible for all the killing, settlement, torture, and imprisonment to which the Palestinian people are subjected. It is no excuse that the American people do not know where their federal tax money goes. (148)

[Abdel Bari Atwan, editor of Al Quds al Arabi] [bin Laden] loves his mother—you really can't imagine how he admires her. And he even he loves his stepfather [whose family name is] Attas. He's a businessman in Jeddah. So usually in our culture, we don't like our stepfather, but he liked him a lot. (151)

[Bergen] The years between 1996 and 2001 were when bin Laden reached the apogee of his power. In Afghanistan he was able to create his own jihad kingdom, as if "The Man Who Would be King" had been remade as a jihadist epic. (161)

[From bin Laden's first declaration (1996)] The presence of the USA Crusader military forces on land, sea and air in the states of the Islamic Gulf is the greatest danger threatening the largest oil reserve in the world. (165)

[From bin Laden's first declaration (1996)] More than 600,000 Iraqi children have died due to lack of food and medicine and as a result of the unjustifiable [UN sanctions during the 1990s] imposed on Iraq and its nation. The children of Iraq are our children. You, the USA, are responsible for the shedding of the blood of these innocent children. (166)

[Abu Jandal] [Bin Laden's] eldest son Abdallah returned to Saudi Arabia [in 1995] after making an arrangement with his uncles and the Saudi ruling family. He wanted to return and settle in Saudi Arabia. Abdallah returned to Saudi Arabia because his views did not agree with his father's. As he said, he came from a wealthy family and deserved to live well on the money his family had. This view was completely at odds with his father's. Sheikh Osama avoided mentioning Abdallah's name after this because he had been hurt by him. He wished that his eldest son had remained with him to help him. He respected his son's wishes, however, and allowed him to return to Saudi Arabia. (168)

[Abdel Bari Atwan] To be honest, the man is likable. He is really nice. You don't see him as somebody who will be the arch-terrorist, who will be the most dangerous man in the world. He doesn't strike you as charismatic. You are with somebody who you feel you knew for maybe ten to fifteen years, you don't feel a stranger when you meet him for the first time. And he doesn't try to impress you. I met a lot of Palestinian leaders. They try to impress you. This man does not try to impress you. Maybe this is his strength. Maybe this is his style. He was extremely natural, very simple, very humble and soft-spoken. You feel he is shy. He doesn't look at you eye to eye. Usually when he talks to you he talks by looking down. His clothes are very, very humble, very simple.

He is not on the defensive, neither on the offensive. And he was a very good listener. You know, he is not like us, we Arabs interrupt the speaker. He waits until you finish your sentence and finish your argument and then he comments with little words. He's not really noisy like us, you know. (168-9)

[Abdel Bari Atwan] He wants to say . . . I am aggrieved at Americans who are occupying Saudi Arabia who are desecrating the Holy Land. That's the most important message he wanted to say. (169)

[Abdel Bari Atwan] He also didn't like Saddam Hussein. And he considered Saddam Hussein as a man who is a secular, but he didn't actually insult Saddam Hussein the way he insulted Yasser Arafat. He didn't like him and he told me he wanted to kick him out of Iraq, as he considered, the Ba'ath (Iraqi socialist) regime [to be an] atheist regime. He considered Saddam Hussein as an atheist, and he hates an atheist. (170)

[Hamid Mir, bin Laden's biographer] He was just protesting on one point: Why are U.S. troops present on my soil [in Saudi Arabia], that's all. That was his problem. He condemned Saddam Hussein in my interview. He gave such kind of abuses that it was very difficult for me to write—socialist Motherfucker—[He said] "The land of the Arab world, the land is like a mother and Saddam Hussein is fucking his mother." He also explained that Saddam Hussein is against us and he discourages Iraqi boys to come to Afghanistan. (179)

[CNN cameraman Peter Jovenal] And then when I left the army in '79, I was just waiting for a war, a relevant war to come up, or any war. And lucky for me, but not for Afghanistan—the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. (180)

[Bergen] [bin Laden] told us that he declared war against the United States in particular because of American foreign policies, particularly the fact that U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia seemed to be a permanent military presence in the holy land of Arabia. He also had other reasons that he was declaring war: the sanctions then in place against Iraq, U.S. support for Israel, and the U.S. backing of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, regimes he doesn't consider sufficiently Islamic.

Those set of reasons he's stuck to. He's been pretty consistent about why he's attacking the United States. It's because of American foreign policies. He did not say anything about Madonna, Hollywood, drugs, sex, or any of the kind of cultural issues you might expect him to be concerned with. It's all about what America is doing in his backyard, as he sees it. He sees this as a defensive war responding to a record of humiliation that began after the end of World War when the Ottoman Empire was carved up by the British and the French. And bin Laden believes that today Muslims are still being humiliated whether it is in Kashmir or Palestine or in Iraq. (182)

[Bergen] It was all business, he spent about an hour with us, he did not plan to hang around. After the formal part of the interview was over, he was talking to Peter Arnett, the correspondent, and the subject of Saddam Hussein came up, and he delivered this quite negative assessment of Saddam. This is in 1997 long before what bin Laden thought of Saddam was a subject of any wider interest. (182-3)

[1997 CNN interview] Peter Arnett: What are your future plans?

bin Laden: You'll see them and hear about them in the media, God willing. (184)

[Abu Jandal] I recall that Brother Osama used to explain to us certain strategic military issues and concepts and he used to tell us that the struggle was not only between the al Qaeda organization and the United States, that al Qaeda is merely a nucleus and a tool to wake up and defeat the American offensive against our Islamic world and drag the United States into a large-scale battle which it cannot control. He used to say: 'We are working for a big operation; namely, dragging the United States into a confrontation with the entire Islamic world.' (193)

[1998 bin Laden statement] First, for over seven years [since the introduction of 500,000 U.S. troops following Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait] the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples. (195)

[Hamid Mir] When he started quoting from the Islamic Sharia and Islamic books and Koran, that the Koran says to fight against the non-Muslims for the supremacy of the Islamic law, there was no thrill. Because, you see, he cannot prove through the Koran that the killing of Americans is Islam, that the killing of every non-Muslim is Islam. He cannot prove that. (201)

[Bergen] Indeed, the American incarceration of Sheikh Rahman has been a hot-button issue for al Qaeda for many years. When the Sheikh was arrested in New York in 1993 on terrorism charges, al Qaeda members based in Sudan debated whether or not to bomb the U.S. embassy in Saudi Arabia in retaliation, a plan that was rejected because of the risk of injury to civilians, scruples the group would later abandon. (206)

[ABC News correspondent John Miller] [I asked him] "What about the World Trade Center bombing [in 1993]. It's not like fighting the Russians on the field of battle. This is targeting innocents and civilians." And he said, "This is a very strange question coming from an American. Was it not your country that bombed Nagasaki and Hiroshima? Were there not women and children and civilians and noncombatants there? You were the people who invented this terrible game and we as Muslims have to use those same tactics against you." It was a very well-formed argument.

He said, "I predict a black day for America; a day after which America will never be the same and the States will not be united," and he pretty much laid it out that this would be a sustained battle. And at that point he went in to one of the answers that we ended up playing a lot, which is he had this message for America—and the one that always struck me because it sounded hyperbolic at that time: "I'm declaring war on the United States. I'm going to attack your country." And I thought, "Yeah, you and what army?" If you took those words and you played them on September 12, 2001, as opposed to say September 9, 2001, it went from sounding quite hyperbolic to—he was telling us all along. (216)

[John Miller] We did an hour special on ABC Nightline with Ted Koppel hosting the show. I remember it going to air and him starting out the whole hour Saying, "Tonight we are going to introduce you to the man who poses the greatest threat to America and it's a name that nobody has ever even heard of, and his name is Osama bin Laden." (218)

[Bergen] On August 7, 1998, two months after bin Laden had announced on ABC News his intention (yet again) to attack American targets, al Qaeda blew up two U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania within nine minutes of each other. The attacks came exactly eight years after President George H. W. Bush announced the introduction of hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers into Saudi Arabia, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait—bin Laden's particular grievance against the United States. (219)

[Testimony of Mohammed al 'Owhali] And al 'Owhali explains to me at this point he realized that his mission is complete, that he did exactly what he was instructed to do. His mission was to help Azzam get the truck as close as possible to the embassy and to scatter away the Kenyan people in and around the area. Al 'Owhali told me that, at that point, it was no longer necessary for him to die in the attack. Al 'Owhali explained to me that he was fully prepared to die in carrying out the mission and that that would equate to being a martyr, to reach martyrdom, dying in completion of your mission. But to die after your mission had already been complete, al 'Owhali explains to me, is not martyrdom, it's suicide. (223-4)

[From President Clinton's Horseshit Address to the Nation on August 20, 1998] They have made the United States their adversary precisely because of what we stand for and what we, stand against. (225)

[Al Jazeera Pakistan chief Ahmad Zaidan] Osama was sitting and I wanted to go [to the] bathroom. And I go to the bathroom and the bathroom was occupied and I came back. And he gave a hint to his people; said, "Okay check whenever this bathroom is free." And really, after only just a few minutes somebody told me, "Okay, it's free" and [Osama] asked me to go. It was some sort of human touch. (254-5)

[Shadi Adalla interrogation] During my training I did hear the instructor frequently talk about the U.S. as an occupying power in Saudi Arabia. This was meant to incite the trainees against the U. S. At the Kandahar airport I saw a large map of the Arab world. It also showed the location of bases and ships of Western forces, e.g., of the British, the French and the Americans. This included the whole Gulf region, the Middle East and Turkey. (264)

[Abu Jandal] [Bin Laden] used to go the wilderness outside Kandahar with all his wives and little children. He would ride with us in his private car and his family would ride in a bus. His grown sons would follow us on horseback although the distance was about one hour by car. He would then sit with his wives and we used to take the car far from that place so that he would not see us and we would not see him. We would communicate by radio. In that place he would teach his wives how to use firearms. They would play together and do some simple physical exercises. He used to lead a normal family life. (266)

[Nizar Trabelsi is a Tunisian who became a professional soccer player in Germany. In his late twenties he drifted into drug addiction and then turned to Islam, subsequently traveling to Afghanistan in 2000 where he became an ardent bin Laden disciple.] While I was in Kandahar a discussion was under way about the possibility of destroying the Buddhist statues in Bamian. (The two statues of the Buddha, each more than a hundred feet high, were carved from cliffs in the third and fifth centuries A.D. They were once one of Afghanistan's most famous tourist attractions. The Taliban destroyed the Buddhas with artillery and explosives in May 2001.) A day or so after my arrival in Kandahar Osama bin Laden suggested to me to accompany him to [Bamian in central Afghanistan]. We went there by helicopter. We stayed there a half day. We climbed the mountain and we participated in wrecking one of the statues, hitting it with our feet on its head. I remember that the [Taliban] explosives hadn't completely destroyed the statue and the Taliban launched a missile at the statue making a hole in Buddha's head. (270-1)

[Nizar Trabelsi] I explained to [bin Laden] what I said to Abu Hafs and he expressed his reservations about my project. He suggested that I should wait because the list of [people wanting to be martyrs was full. (271)

Jabarah stated that there were code words used by al Qaeda. The code words were generally established by the individual cells. Some of the code words they used in Asia were:

M urkel = Malaysia

Soup = Singapore

Terminal = Indonesia

Hotel = Philippines

Book = Passport

American = White Meat (274)

[Fouad al Rabia] Abu Muldah asked bin Laden straightforward what he wanted. Bin Laden said he wanted the Americans out of the Gulf. (278)

[bin Laden] We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy, who would be killed based on the position of the tower. We calculated that the floors that would be hit would be three or four floors. I was the most optimistic of them all due to my experience in this field [of construction. I] was thinking that the fire from the gas in the plane would melt the iron structure of the building and collapse the area where the plane hit and all the floors above it only. This is all that we had hoped for.

[Members of al Qaeda in Afghanistan] were overjoyed when the first plane hit the building, so I said to them: "Be patient." The difference between the first and the second plane hitting the towers was twenty minutes. (283-4)

[Bakr Atyani, former Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC) bureau chief in Pakistan.] I think really no one took [al Qaeda's threats] seriously. I remember when I was interviewed by the Washington Post [July 8, 2001, edition], their correspondent was Pamela Constable and she asked me after the interview, "Do you really believe that they are going to do it?" and I told her, "Really Pam, I believe, they're going to do it really, because it sounds serious." (286)

[Peter Jouvenal] Ahmed told me most Arabs and Afghans respect Osama [because] if they knew he was coming to a house, they would always make a special effort to make it comfortable in a room. And he would always sleep somewhere else on the floor with his gun. He wouldn't want any refineries and basically roughed it all the time. And they were all very impressed by that. (288)

[Peter Jouvenal] Then the fun starts because I thought that maybe the FBI was a competent organization. One of the [FBI agents] was Lebanese, the other one was a New Yorker. And they said that they want me to go [with Ahmed] to Thailand. So I said, "What about a visa?" Ahmed said, "Oh, [the FBI agents] said its okay. They've sorted it all out." And I thought, well, this is the

FBI, they are the big boys on the block. And so we get to the check-in counter. I handed over Ahmed's passport and ticket and they say, "Where is your visa?" We go back to the hotel: there is this message on my machine: "Don't tell anybody. We really fucked up," in the New York accent. So [later Ahmed] goes off to Bangkok [the capitol], and spends three weeks hanging out waiting for these dickheads [the FBI] to come back. Fairly soon after, 9/11 happens and [Ahmed and his] whole family go off to the States. So obviously they [the FBI] become a bit more serious after 9/11. (288-9)

[Bergen] I was always puzzled by the fact that bin Laden, who had declared war on the "Crusaders and the Jews" in 1998, had hitherto not attacked Israeli or Jewish targets. After the 9/11 attacks I came to realize that for bin Laden, and his rabidly anti-Semitic colleagues, the Pentagon was a Jewish target. (291)

[Bergen's letter to John Burns, less than one month before the WTC attacks] I think there is a major story to be told wrapping around the new bin Laden videotape and the various threats against US facilities in past months which can paint both a compelling picture of the bin Laden organization today, and responsibly suggest that an al Qaeda attack is in the works. . . . Clearly al Qaeda was and is planning something. . . .

Also no one has thought to put the videotape in the context of al Qaeda's modus operandi which is to subtly indicate a plot is in the works before it takes place. We saw this in May 1998 when bin Laden held a press conference in Afghanistan where he talked of "good news in coming weeks" and a few days later told ABC News that he predicted a "black day" for America. Nine weeks later the embassies in Africa were bombed. (292)

[Bergen to Burns] A few months before the Cole bombing [in Yemen], as you know, a tape appeared which is notable for two things: bin Laden is wearing the jambiya Yemeni dagger, which he had never previously worn in any of the dozens of photos that exist of him, and his deputy Ayman al Zawahiri specifically called for attacks on American forces in Yemen. This tape is of more than passing interest to U.S. investigators, and again shows how al Qaeda subtly signals its next move. (292-3)

[Bergen to Burns] For bin Laden, however, the greatest insult to Muslims is the continued presence of Americans in the holy land of Arabia. Bin Laden says: "These Americans brought women and Jewish women who can go anywhere in our holy land" adding "the Arab rulers worship the God of the White House." These statements are made over images of the Saudi royal family members meeting American leaders such as Colin Powell. (293)

[Bergen] John Burns subsequently wrote a prescient story headlined ON VIDEOTAPE BIN LADEN CHARTS VIOLENT FUTURE, which was posted to the *New York Times* Web site on September 9, 2001, but because of an editing dispute, the newspaper did not run a version of Burns's story until a day *after* the 9/11 attacks. In an Orwellian rewriting of history, the *Times* took Burns's pre-9/11 story off its Web site, an episode an editor later conceded to be "a bad screw-up." (294)

[Burns] bin Laden's main focus has been on driving American forces from the Arabian peninsula. (295)

[Yosri Fouda, who interviewed the operational planners of the 9/11 attacks] They said having studied the targets on the ground, that the White House was initially on the list, but they decided that it be taken off the list for navigation reasons. Apparently it was difficult to hit it from the air, according to them. And it was later replaced by another spectacular target, Capitol Hill. (302)

[Ramzi Binalshibh] [When they found out] the brothers shouted "Allah-u-Akbar! Thanks to God!" and cried. Everyone thought that this was the only operation (the attack on the first World Trade Center tower). We said to them: "Wait, wait," Suddenly our brother Marwan [the pilot] was

violently ramming the plane into the Trade Center in an unbelievable manner! We were watching live and praying: "God ... aim ... aim ... aim" (305)

[From the videotaped "will" of (9/11 hijacker) Abdul Aziz al Omari, a Saudi from Asir Province] I am writing this will and do not know where I should begin. Ideas are accumulating in my mind. This is a message to all the infidels and to America. The message is: "Leave the Arabian Peninsula defeated and stop supporting the coward Jews in Palestine." (309)

[bin Laden's first videotape after 9/11] To America, I say only a few words to it and its people. I swear by God, who has elevated the skies without pillars, neither America nor the people who live in it will dream of security before we live it in Palestine, and at before all the infidel armies leave the land of Muhammad, peace be upon him. (317)

[Hamid Mir] [Bin Laden] watches CNN, BBC. I have seen with my own eyes Osama bin Laden watching CNN. I'll tell you a very interesting thing. When I met him after 9/11, [bin Laden] said, "I was watching you on the Larry King show a few days ago and you told Larry King that when Osama bin Laden talks on religion he is not convincing, but when he talks on politics he is very much convincing, so today I will convince you on some religious issues." So I said, "Okay, you watch Larry King show?" He said, "Yes, I am fighting a big war and I have to monitor the activities of my enemy through these TV channels." And an interesting thing is that in those days the Taliban government was intact and Mullah Omar imposed a ban all over Afghanistan that nobody can watch TV and bin Laden was violating the orders of Mullah Omar.

The book written by Mr. Yossef Bodansky [*Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*, published in 1999] was lying in front of [bin Laden]. So during the interview, the book was not mentioned. After the interview, I mentioned, I said, "Mr. bin Laden, you are reading these kind of books these days?" So he laughed and said, "Yes, it is very interesting book. If you read this book, you can find out many jokes in this book. And I think Mr. Yossef Bodansky is a great friend of mine. He is misguiding Americans about me. And if the Americans have this kind of information about me, then I am the happiest person on this earth."

I was not ready to say that bin Laden is involved in the [9/11] attacks. You see, I was questioning the accusation that he is involved. When I visited Afghanistan, I spent some days there, I was totally changed because I saw the pictures of Atta [the lead hijacker] hanging in the [al Qaeda] hideouts. Privately they admitted everything. They said, they [who attacked on 9/11] are our brothers, but they said that, "When the Americans kill Muslims in Sudan, they don't admit that we are responsible. When the Israelis kill Palestinians, they don't admit that we are responsible for the attacks. When the Indians kill Kashmiris, they don't admit that we have killed them. So now this is our turn. We have killed them and we are not going to admit that."

My tape recorder was on and one very important al Qaeda leader he turned off my tape recorder and said, "Yes, I did it. Okay. Now play your tape recorder." I played the tape recorder and he said, "No, I'm not responsible." (318-19)

[Feroz Ali Abbasi on the bombing of sites in Afghanistan] Even funnier is how the Americans broadcasted to the media the fact that they had told the Northern Alliance to ground its planes. Telegraphing that they were coming. Maybe just in case Osama Bin Laden hadn't quite packed and left yet. (327)

[Bergen] If Fox News and CNN could arrange for their crews to cover Tora Bora, it is puzzling that the U.S. military could not put more boots on the ground to entrap the hardcore of al Qaeda. Sadly, there were more American journalists at the battle of Tora Bora than there were U.S. soldiers. In sum, the Tora Bora battle was a missed opportunity to bring bin Laden to justice. (336)

[Bergen: From its earliest days some members of al Qaeda dreamed of inflicting mass casualty attacks with WMD. Paulo Jose de Almeida Santos is a Portuguese member of al Qaeda who joined the group in 1990. After an eight-year jail term in an Italian prison for attempting to kill the king of Afghanistan in Rome in 1991, Santos settled down somewhere in East Africa, where he was interviewed by Jose Pedro Castanheira of the Portuguese magazine *Expresso* in April 2002. In that interview he said that al Qaeda's leaders initially had a somewhat negative attitude to the use of WMDs.]

[Santos] I drew up a terrible, diabolical plan to kill Israelis. Something like using mercury to poison the waters, which would poison the harvests and the cereals. Horrible! Now the thought of those diabolical plans sends shivers down my spine. It was rejected [by al Qaeda's leadership]. I spent a few days in a medical library in Pakistan studying synthetic poisons, which could be used on the skin and which rapidly enter the blood vessels (like many creams do). The idea was to create a poison which by simple contact with a person's skin could kill in a matter of minutes or hours. In Peshawar there were a number of people we knew to be western spies. I made a suggestion: "Why don't we catch a spy, an American, a European or whatever, take him home with us and carry out experiments on him?"

Al Qaeda said that in the first place it was necessary to ask the theological opinion of a sheikh (religious authority). We went to see a sheikh, who, when he heard the proposal, almost kicked me. He was furious: "You want to do such tests on human beings? Do you think we are Nazis!?" They then said: "Experiment on animals," We did an experiment on a rabbit, but it didn't work. The best animals for experimenting on are supposed to be pigs because they have the same metabolism as humans. But where do you find a pig [in Muslim Pakistan]? (337-8)
[Peter Jovenal] ! Since the collapse of the Soviet Union there have always been rumors about nuclear products or bits of plutonium floating through Afghanistan. Looking back in perspective I actually think that most of them are an elaborate can trick by people in Russia who persuaded Afghans to buy nuclear material. It could be radioactive waste from an X-ray machine. So there was all this whispering about plutonium and uranium and what have you for sale. I personally think it was an elaborate scam.

[The information about the nuclear materials came from an Afghan friend.] He was sick. I think he looked at this stuff with a friend in Mazare-Sharif. I think we had given him instructions to run a watch over the stuff and see if the watch stopped. All these things he did and then he was sick and his friend was sick the next day. He said his eyebrows started falling out. I always presumed that it was some sort of radioactive waste; maybe it came from an X-ray machine in a hospital. (344-5)

[al Qaeda spokesman Suleiman Abu Gaith] Why were millions of people astounded by what happened to America on September 11? Did the world think that anything else would happen? What happened to America is something natural, an expected event for a country that uses terror, arrogant policy, and suppression against the nations and the peoples, and imposes a single method, thought, and way of life, as if the people of the entire world are clerks in its government offices and employed by its commercial companies and institutions. (347)

[Abu Musab al Suri] I feel sorry because there were no weapons of mass destruction in the planes that attacked New York and Washington on 9/11. We might have been relieved of the biggest number possible of voters who elected Bush for a second term! (347-8)

[Bergen] The United States' war in Iraq has energized al Qaeda, its affiliated groups, and like-minded jihadists around the world. What has happened in Iraq is what bin Laden could not have hoped for in his wildest dreams: The United States invaded an oil-rich Muslim nation in the heart of the Middle East, the very type of imperial adventure that bin Laden has long predicted is the "Crusaders'" long-term goal in the region. The American invasion deposed the secular, socialist Saddam, whom bin Laden had long despised, ignited Sunni and Shia fundamentalist fervor in

Iraq, and provoked a classic "defensive" jihad that has galvanized jihad-minded Muslims around the world.

This is not an arcane matter of Islamic theology, but a key reason that Americans are dying in significant numbers in Iraq today. The Koran has two sets of justifications for holy war: one concerns a "defensive" jihad, when a Muslim land is under attack by non-Muslims, while another set of justifications concerns grounds for an "offensive" jihad, which countenances unprovoked attacks on infidels. Generally, Muslims consider the defensive justifications for jihad to be the most legitimate grounds for war. It was, for instance, a "defensive" jihad that Muslim clerics invoked against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s. (350)

[Bergen] Some, including President Bush, have suggested that it is better to fight the terrorists on the streets of Baghdad than on those of Boston. This comforting notion is based on the dubious premise that there is a finite number of terrorists who can all be attracted to one place where they can then be killed. The reality is that the Iraq war has greatly expanded the pool of terrorists, reflected in the surge of "significant" attacks since the war began. The year 2003 saw the highest incidence of such acts in two decades. And, astonishingly, the number of significant attacks then tripled in 2004. Given these numbers, it is curious that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously complained that "we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror." Exponentially rising terrorism figures is one metric that seems relevant. (351)

[Sayf Adel] Our expectations of the situation indicated that the Americans would inevitably make a mistake and invade Iraq sooner or later. Such an invasion would aim at overthrowing the regime. Therefore, we should play an important role in the resistance.

Contrary to what the Americans frequently reiterated, al Qaeda did not have any relationship with Saddam Hussein or his regime. We had to draw up a plan to enter Iraq through the north that was not under the control of [Saddam's] regime. We would then spread south to the areas of our fraternal Sunni brothers. (361)

[Letter of Ayman al Zawahiri] Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the sheik of the slaughterers, etc. I say to you that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. (367)

[Bergen] Since the 9/11 attacks, bin Laden and his chief deputy, Ayman al Zawahiri, have released more than thirty audio and videotapes, an average of one tape every six weeks. Tracing back the chain of custody of these tapes is the one guaranteed method of finding the location of al Qaeda's leaders. However, despite the fact that most of these tapes have generally been released first to Al Jazeera television, U.S. intelligence services (which are funded to the tune of at least 30 billion dollars a year) are seemingly incapable of tracing the chain of custody of the tapes, an abject failure of intelligence gathering. (377)

[Bergen: The bin Laden videotape played on Al Jazeera, and television networks around the world, on October 29, 2004. On the tape, in a Halloween parody of an Oval Office address, bin Laden speaks directly to the American people from behind a desk, dressed formally in gold robes. The interview is well lit, suggesting a well-prepared production, and we see bin Laden without a gun at his side, a rare sight. On the tape, bin Laden for the first time makes an unequivocal public admission of his own involvement in the 9/11 plot and he responds directly to President Bush's frequent claim that al Qaeda is attacking the United States because of its freedoms rather than its foreign policy.

[bin Laden] You the American people, I talk to you today about the best way to avoid another catastrophe and about war, its reasons and its consequences. And in that regard, I say to you that security is an important pillar of human life, and that free people do not compromise their

security. Contrary to what Bush says and claims, that we hate [your] freedom—[So] why did we not attack Sweden?

I wonder about you [the American people]. Although we are [now] the fourth year after 9/11, Bush is still exercising confusion and misleading you and not telling you the true reason [why you are being attacked]. Therefore, the motivations are still there for what happened to be repeated. . . . Your security is not in the hands of Kerry or Bush or al Qaeda. Your security is in your own hands. Each state that will not mess with our security will find security themselves. (378)

[Bergen] But the short answer to the question about where bin Laden might be can be summarized. as: Who knows. (381)

[Saad al Fagih, formerly a surgeon in Saudi Arabia, runs a Saudi opposition group based in London.] I think that [al Qaeda's] influence is immense now in the Muslim and Arab world. What the [U.S.] leaders have done [after the 9/11 attacks] is actually to implement what bin Laden wanted. That is to wage a cosmic campaign against Muslims. (388)

[Bergen] As we have learned to our cost in recent years, much "secret" information is simply wrong, while information that is public—for instance, bin Laden's repeated calls for attacks against the United States in the years before 2001—is too often discounted. One of the lessons of September 11 is that we should pay careful attention to what the jihadists are actually saying. (392)

[Bergen] Zawahiri complained in his 2001 biography, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, that the masses have not embraced al Qaeda. (This is despite the fact that bin Laden enjoys a large degree of personal popularity in the Muslim world for his stance against the United States.) In a passage quoted in this chapter Zawahiri explains, "The jihad movement "must come closer to the masses. We must win the people's confidence, respect, and affection." But that is not going to be possible when the average Muslim knows that killing civilians is explicitly prohibited by the Koran, and al Qaeda presents no positive vision of the world it wants to create other than vague references to restoring the Caliphate. (392)

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