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Osama bin Laden (AP/Wide World Photos)

OSAMA BIN LADEN'S DECLARATION OF JIHAD AGAINST AMERICANS

1996

"The blatant imperial arrogance of America, under the cover of the immoral United Nations, has prevented the dispossessed from arming themselves."

Overview



The Declaration of Jihad on the Americans Occupying the Country of the Two Sacred Places, issued in August 1996, was Osama bin Laden's first call for jihad against the United States. Also known as the "Ladenese Epistle," it can be taken to represent al Qaeda's declaration of war on Washington.

In the context of debates among Muslim militants, it called for adjusting strategy so that instead of fighting local battles, they would wage a global-scale jihad against the Western superpower in response to its assaults on Muslims. The declaration also addresses issues specific to Saudi Arabia, asserting that American forces on Saudi soil constitute a military occupation and that Muslims should expel them.

In terms of Bin Laden's career, the declaration marked a turning point. As a young man in his twenties, he joined the Afghan struggle against Soviet forces by 1984. In the early 1990s, he became active in Saudi Arabia's dissident religious current. The Saudi government cracked down on the dissidents, however, imprisoning some and driving others, like Bin Laden, into exile. In 1992 he found refuge in Sudan. The United States and Saudi Arabia suspected him of plotting terrorist activities, so they put pressure on the Sudanese government to expel him. In 1996 he moved back to Afghanistan; shortly after arriving there, he published the Declaration of Jihad. Two years later, al Qaeda carried out its first major terrorist attack on American targets with truck bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. There followed the 2000 attack on the USS *Cole* in the port of Aden, Yemen, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, and the attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001.

Context

Bin Laden's Declaration of Jihad reflects the intersection of several currents in late-twentieth-century Muslim politics, including the evolution of Islamic revivalist ideologies, the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan of the 1980s, and the emergence of religious dissent in Saudi Arabia. By

the 1970s, Islamic revivalist organizations like the Society of the Muslim Brothers, or Muslim Brotherhood, had become influential actors in Arab and Muslim countries. Such organizations sought to make Islam the central principle of politics and society in the belief that doing so would improve moral and material conditions and strengthen society against Western powers. In Egypt, the Society of the Muslim Brothers was the largest and most influential revivalist organization. The Muslim Brotherhood was generally inclined to consider gradual reform the surest path to realizing its vision of a true Islamic social order. In the mid-1970s, however, radical splinter groups jettisoned the gradualist approach and adopted a revolutionary attitude toward the Egyptian government, deeming its leaders to be apostates—renouncers of Islam—and therefore legitimate targets for religiously sanctioned warfare, or jihad.

Throughout the history of Islam from its rise in the seventh century, jihad as a form of military struggle took two forms: either warfare against non-Muslim lands in order to expand the realm of Islam or warfare to defend Muslim lands against non-Muslim aggression. (Jihad as a spiritual struggle to bring one's soul into alignment with divine will is a related but distinct sense of the term, with its own history.) Deeming a Muslim ruler to be an apostate and labeling rebellion against such a ruler to be jihad is a modern development in Muslim thought. In the name of such jihad, militants assassinated the Egyptian president Anwar as-Sadat in 1981. His successor, Hosni Mubarak, was obliged to fight militant organizations that attacked government officials, security forces, and foreign tourists. During the 1990s the Egyptian government succeeded in its campaign to suppress the militant organizations, but their ideology of rebellion in the name of jihad spread to other Muslim countries.

Jihad was also invoked in Muslim movements for national liberation and minority rights. In Palestine and Kashmir, for example, the breakup of the British Empire caused Muslim populations to find themselves living under non-Muslim rule—Jewish Israeli rule in Palestine and Hindu-majority Indian rule in Kashmir. In the case of Palestine, national liberation movements from the 1950s to the 1980s generally framed the cause in secular, anticolonial terms, as did the nationalist movements in African and Asian politics. In the 1980s, however, it became increasing-

Time Line

1957	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ March 10 Osama bin Laden is born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ April A Marxist revolution is staged in Afghanistan, with the Marxists seizing control in Kabul.
1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ December The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan to support the regime against anti-Communist forces, initiating the Soviet-Afghan War, which lasts until 1988.
1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bin Laden goes to Pakistan to support the Afghan cause.
1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ August Bin Laden forms al Qaeda in Peshawar, Pakistan.
1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ August 2 Iraq invades Kuwait; Saudi Arabia invites U.S. forces in to defend against Iraq, and Saudi dissidents condemn the resort to non-Muslim military assistance.
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ February The United States and coalition forces liberate Kuwait.

ly common for those involved to frame liberation struggle as jihad to free Muslim land from infidel rule. In historical terms, this form of jihad fit the template of defense against non-Muslim aggression and therefore more readily captured Muslim imaginations than did the notion of rebellious jihad against an apostate ruler.

The idiom of defensive jihad likewise colored the struggle in Afghanistan against a Communist regime backed by the Soviet Union. In April 1978, a Marxist political party seized power in Kabul. In the context of the cold war rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, the Afghan coup—called the Saur Revolution—prompted alarm in Washington, which was also preoccupied with events in Iran, where antigovernment protests that year led to the ouster of a pro-Western monarchy. As much of the world's attention focused on developments in the newly proclaimed Islamic Republic of Iran, Kabul's Marxist regime was undermined by disputes between the ruling Khalq faction and the rival Parcham faction. A bloody purge in September 1979, whereby the leader of the Khalq tried to eliminate the Parcham's leadership, threatened to destabilize the government. Moscow responded by sending military forces into Afghanistan to oust the Khalq and install Parcham's leader. Instead of stabilizing the situation, the Soviet invasion initiated the Soviet-Afghan war: The United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia supported the anti-Communist Afghan forces.

Muslim solidarity with Afghans took the form of a transnational volunteer campaign, with headquarters in Peshawar, Pakistan, as thousands of young Muslims from Arab countries and central and southern Asia flocked to fight the infidel Communists. Various Islamic groups operated guest houses that served as centers for recruitment, propaganda, and channels to military training camps. Osama bin Laden founded al Qaeda in August 1988. Al Qaeda originally limited membership to Arab volunteers for the broadly defined purpose of waging jihad on behalf of oppressed Muslims in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

One phase of the Soviet-Afghan War concluded when Moscow decided to withdraw its forces in 1989, leaving its Communist client exposed to Afghan enemies. The ensuing civil war involved the defeat of the Communists in 1992, leaving Afghan forces and the emerging Taliban movement to grapple for power. In the meantime, Muslim volunteers departed for other fronts on the expanding horizon of jihad in defense of Muslims in Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir, and elsewhere.

In 1989 and 1990, Bin Laden and other Saudi "Afghans," as veterans of the jihad in Afghanistan were known, returned home as heroes to a country where upholding Islam formed the core of dynastic legitimacy. Some decades earlier, the Saudi Arabian dynasty had demonstrated Muslim solidarity when it admitted Muslim Brothers fleeing persecution under Arab nationalist governments. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Saudi government ostentatiously championed religious causes by cooperating in pan-Islamic organizations to distribute funds for mosques, schools, and publications. The one blemish on

the Saudi government's pan-Islamic record was its alignment with the United States, which was unpopular for its close relations with Israel. Saudi Arabia's delicate balance between strategic security under Washington's military umbrella and domestic legitimacy through adherence to Islamic principles was ruptured in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

When Saddam Hussein's forces occupied Kuwait in August 1990, it was not clear whether he intended to send his army into Saudi Arabia as well, in order to seize the world's richest oil fields. Not trusting Hussein's intentions, the United States dispatched a diplomatic mission to Riyadh to see whether Saudi leaders would allow American and allied military forces into the kingdom to deter a possible Iraqi attack. Bin Laden tried to dissuade the Saudi government from admitting non-Muslim forces, proposing that Saudi forces and Muslim volunteers for jihad, on the Afghan model, could protect the kingdom. The Saudi government nonetheless decided to rely on the massive conventional military power offered by Washington. The upshot was a severe political crisis for Saudi Arabia.

The crux of the controversy over hosting American forces rested on two issues. First, Muslims are not supposed to seek military assistance from non-Muslims. Second, the introduction of non-Muslim troops into Arabia created the impression that the holy places were under infidel occupation. Saudi religious dissidents like Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Auda emerged as leaders of a movement known as Sahwa, or "the Awakening." They argued that the government had effectively surrendered the country's sovereignty to Washington. When American troops remained even after the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the dissidents called for fundamental government reform to curb Western influence, broaden the scope of Islamic law, and relieve economic distress. By 1994 the authorities had suppressed the movement through censorship and arrests of leaders such as al-Hawali and al-Auda. Bin Laden ended up in Afghanistan by May 1996.

Meanwhile, debate continued among Muslim militants regarding the strategies of jihad. Until the mid-1990s, the antigovernment facet of jihad had focused solely on secular authoritarian regimes in Muslim nations, seeking to destabilize Algeria and Egypt, for instance. These regimes and others were able to defeat the jihadist rebels, leading some in their ranks to conclude that it was fruitless to attack "the near enemy"—the regional regimes—when they had the powerful backing of the Western powers, "the far enemy," especially the United States. Proponents of waging jihad against the far enemy eventually decided to target the United States, in the belief that only if its forces were expelled from the Muslim world would jihad against its local clients be successful. The declaration issued by Bin Laden in August 1996, then, embodies the mixing of Saudi religious dissent with the emergence of the notion of fighting a jihad against the far enemy, a struggle that would become known as global jihad.

Time Line	
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May Saudi dissidents present a petition to the king seeking a greater role for religion in decision making and law.
1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Spring Bin Laden moves to Sudan.
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ September Saudi authorities imprison leaders of religious dissent.
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ November 13 A truck bombing at a Saudi Arabian National Guard building in Riyadh kills five Americans and two Indians.
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May Bin Laden moves to Afghanistan. ■ June 26 A truck bombing at a military complex in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, kills nineteen U.S. soldiers. ■ August 23 Bin Laden issues his Declaration of Jihad against Americans.
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ August 7 Al Qaeda stages attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.



Time Line

2000

- **October 12**
Al Qaeda executes an attack on the USS *Cole* in Aden's harbor.

2001

- **September 11**
Al Qaeda operatives hijack four passenger jets in a terrorist attack on the United States.

About the Author

Osama bin Laden (1957–) is the Saudi leader of al Qaeda, an organization dedicated to waging jihad against the United States and Western influence in the Muslim world. He grew up in one of Saudi Arabia's wealthiest families in the Red Sea city of Jidda. He was in his early twenties when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. Like many idealistic young men in the Muslim world, he went to Pakistan to support the anti-Communist jihad, arriving in Peshawar in 1984. Bin Laden lent his organizing and fund-raising talents to the jihad, and he also fought in at least one battle against Soviet forces. Toward the end of the war, in August 1988, he founded al Qaeda in Peshawar. After the Soviet evacuation, he returned to Saudi Arabia and became active in the religious protest movement against the government's decision to host American military forces in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

In the early 1990s, Bin Laden was yet a minor figure among religious dissidents, but his opposition to the government resulted in his expulsion from his homeland and resettlement in Sudan. There he expanded his contacts with militants from different countries, building on relationships formed in Pakistan during the 1980s. In May 1996, the Sudanese government succumbed to pressure from the United States and Saudi Arabia to deport him. Bin Laden then moved to Afghanistan, and shortly after establishing new headquarters there, he issued the August 1996 Declaration of Jihad. As long as he resided in Khartoum, he had refrained from issuing inflammatory statements that would complicate Sudan's official relations with Riyadh and Washington. In Afghanistan's anarchic circumstances, he was no longer so constrained. In the next two years he attracted increasing attention as a potential threat to Western interests in the Muslim world. Al Qaeda's attacks on U.S. targets between 1998 and 2001 made him the focus of attention among national security officials and experts in the West. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan, forcing him to flee over the border

into Pakistan, where he is believed to have found refuge in the rugged mountains of North-West Frontier Province.

Explanation and Analysis of the Document

The Declaration of Jihad on the Americans Occupying the Country of the Two Sacred Places was published in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, a London-based Arabic newspaper. The purpose of the document was to persuade Muslims that the United States is the primary enemy of Muslims, responsible for oppressing them in numerous lands, and that Muslims therefore have a duty to wage jihad against America. The declaration blends religious texts with descriptions of overall Muslim suffering and the specific suffering of Muslims in Saudi Arabia. In the latter case, the declaration asserts that oppression, corruption, and economic mismanagement are connected to what it calls American military occupation of the heart of the Muslim world. The abridged version of the document reproduced here captures all of the major themes in the original version, which expands on grievances particular to Saudi Arabia and incorporates more citations of classical authorities.

◆ Paragraphs 1–9

Bin Laden opens by addressing Muslims in general and the Muslims of the Arabian Peninsula in particular. The declaration follows the convention of Islamic discourse by providing citations from the two authoritative sources for guidance, the Qur'an and the Sunna. In Arabic, *al-qur'an* means "the recitation," referring to the recitation of God's revealed word by the prophet Muhammad. The Sunna is the prophetic tradition, Muhammad's words and deeds recorded in hadiths, or reports traced to him. The Declaration of Jihad begins with a hadith in which the Prophet calls for expelling polytheists from Arabia. Bin Laden cites the hadith to remind Muslims of their obligation to rid Arabia of Americans. The Arabic term in the hadith translated as "polytheists" is *kuffar*, which has the general sense of "unbelievers" and can refer to both Christians and Jews.

Five quotations from the Qur'an follow the invocation of God's guidance. They call on the believers (Muslims) to be mindful of God, to trust that obedience to God and the Prophet will lead to success, and to remember that the believers are the best of humankind. The presentation of these verses serves to reinforce the Muslim believer's resolve to undertake a difficult and risky mission. There follows a hadith warning believers of a duty to restrain oppressors, an allusion to the Saudi authorities.

◆ Paragraphs 10 and 11

The declaration proceeds to remind Muslims that they are under wide-ranging assault by Jewish and Christian powers. In April 1996, Israel had attacked Lebanon in an escalation of border clashes with the Hezbollah militia. On April 18 an Israeli artillery shell had struck a UN compound near the village of Qana, killing over one hundred Arab civilians who had sought refuge there. Meanwhile,



Iraq was under UN sanctions that Muslims blamed for shortages of food and medicine, which they considered the cause of many civilian deaths. The list of eleven other regions where Muslims were struggling against occupation or non-Muslim domination illustrates the broad scale of Muslim suffering attributed to the United States and the United Nations for not allowing Muslims to acquire arms to defend themselves. The worst of all offenses against Muslims is cited as the American occupation of Saudi Arabia, because the Arabian Peninsula is the cradle of Islam and site of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

◆ Paragraphs 12–14

Bin Laden next asserts that despite the Muslim world's dire condition, believers should not despair, as religious scholars were leading an awakening to stir Muslim believers to rise up against their enemies. Islamic religious scholars have been natural leaders against corrupt rulers who collude with infidel enemies, and there are many historical examples of such scholars. Ibn Taymīyah (1263–1328), a fourteenth-century Syrian scholar who has become a significant influence on modern revivalist thinkers, urged the Muslims of his time to rally against a nominally Muslim Mongol dynasty rulership over Iraq and Iran. 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Salam al-Sulami (1181–1262) is celebrated for having denounced a Muslim ruler who allied with the Crusaders against a Muslim rival. These two medieval scholars, renowned for standing up to rulers and urging believers to fight infidel enemies, are models for many modern-day Muslims.

Modern heroes include Abdallah Azzam (1941–1989), a Palestinian Muslim Brother whose activities for the Afghan jihad and writings on jihad in general have inspired many Muslims to enlist in the transnational militant movement. Ahmed Yassin (1937–2004), killed by an Israeli missile strike, was the leading religious figure in the Palestinian Hamas movement. Omar Abd al-Rahman (1938–) was the Egyptian leader of the militant Islamic Group. He was not killed by the United States, as the declaration states, but is serving a life sentence there for conspiracy to detonate a truck bomb under the World Trade Center in 1993. Salman al-Auda (1955–) and Safar al-Hawali (1950–) were the two leading figures in Saudi Arabia's Awakening (*Sahwa*) movement of the 1980s and 1990s. The declaration depicts the Saudi government as an American puppet, claiming that the Saudi authorities arrested al-Auda and al-Hawali at Washington's behest.

Bin Laden proceeds to place himself in the line of brave scholars, from Ibn Taymīyah to the present, who suffered for speaking truth to power and were forced to move from one country to another. Bin Laden found a haven in Khurasan, by which he means Afghanistan, site of the recent Muslim triumph over the Soviet Union. From his haven in Afghanistan, he says, he plans to strive against the alliance of Jews and Christians—in secular terms, Israel and the United States—which was inflicting injustice on *umma*, the worldwide community of Muslim believers. He highlights what are to his mind the two most grievous instances of the Judeo-Christian assault on Muslims: the

occupation of Jerusalem by Israel and the takeover of Saudi Arabia by the United States. In his view, they are not discrete, unrelated political events but part of a single plan to oppress Muslims.

◆ Paragraphs 15–19

The declaration turns from an overview of the Muslim world to conditions in Saudi Arabia, where every segment of society was suffering the effects of poverty, repression, and injustice. Bin Laden draws attention to anti-American violence in the kingdom and asserts that this was a natural reaction to widespread suffering. The fatal explosions in Riyadh and Khobar were expressions of mounting internal pressures. The Riyadh explosion took place in November 1995, when five Americans and two Indians were killed in a truck bombing against a National Guard building. A connection to al Qaeda has not been established, although the perpetrators were veterans of the Afghan jihad and Bin Laden applauded their deed. The explosion in Khobar, a city in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, occurred in June 1996, when a massive truck bomb was detonated near a military complex, killing nineteen U.S. soldiers. This attack was not related to al Qaeda; rather, it was probably the work of Saudi Hezbollah al-Hejaz militants.

The declaration taps the current of Saudi dissent in paragraph 16 by addressing economic and political issues. In the early and mid-1990s, low oil prices, a high rate of population increase, and slow economic growth made citizens' daily lives more difficult. Ordinary Saudis felt the effects of inflation and personal debt. The invocation of usury and foreign debt intimates the moral failings of the government, a point driven home with the complaint that the country abides by man-made laws rather than divine law. Government failure was not limited to the economic and legal realms: It included the fundamental task of defending the country against foreign threat, as posed by Iraq when it invaded Kuwait. That failure was embodied in the decision to allow American troops into Saudi Arabia, a situation considered equivalent to foreign occupation. When courageous religious scholars denounced the government for failing to manage the economy, defend the homeland, and rule according to God's law, the authorities threw them in prison.

To emphasize the Saudi government's most grievous offenses, the declaration states that the government lost legitimacy for two reasons in particular: first, for not ruling in accordance with religious law and crushing the dissent of religious scholars and "pious youth" who supported them and, second, for failing to defend the kingdom and permitting a prolonged Crusader occupation, which became the central factor underlying the country's terrible plight. All of these problems and policies came about despite efforts to offer sincere advice to the king. As early as May 1991 (the year 1411 AH in the Islamic calendar), religious intellectuals signed a petition calling for reforms to address economic problems and to buttress the Saudi government's commitment to Islam rather than paying lip service. Instead of heeding that petition and subsequent calls for reform, the ruling family ignored them and punished their authors.



A United States Marine walks with embassy employees and an FBI investigator in front of the burned-out wreckage of the U.S. Embassy in Tanzania in August 1998. (AP/Wide World Photos)

◆ **Paragraph 20 and 21**

In paragraph 20 the declaration comes to speak more directly to its Muslim audience, first by posing a rhetorical question asking how the Saudi government can be the largest arms buyer and trading partner with a country that occupies the kingdom and props up Israeli control over Palestine, with the accompanying killing and deportation of its Muslims. In order to combat the United States, Muslims in Saudi Arabia should boycott American goods as part of fulfilling the duty to wage jihad.

The declaration then cites authoritative religious texts to summon Muslim youth to wage jihad against the Americans occupying the Muslim holy places. The Qur'an promises heavenly reward to believers who die in the course of waging jihad. Three hadiths describe in detail the heavenly rewards in store for martyrs, such as forgiveness for sins, high standing among the denizens of paradise, marriage to seventy-two virgins, and the right to intercede for seventy kinsmen. Continuing the citation of religious texts in paragraph 21, the declaration cites a hadith in which the angel Gabriel urged the Prophet not to rest after a battlefield triumph against a coalition of Arabian tribes (the *ahzab*, or

parties). Instead, the Prophet was to lead his men against the Banu Qurayza (here spelled Bani Qurayza), a Jewish clan that had not accepted his authority.

◆ **Paragraphs 22–24**

The lesson for today's Muslims is that achieving victory in one quarter, such as Afghanistan or Bosnia-Herzegovina, is no reason to cease waging jihad when Muslims are under occupation in Saudi Arabia and Palestine. Therefore, Bin Laden calls on Muslims not only in occupied lands but, indeed, everywhere to join the jihad against the Americans and the Israelis, the enemies of Muslims.

The language of the declaration provokes the believer's imagination to see the world through the lens of religion rather than nationality: Muslims are brethren and compatriots, not citizens of different nations, and they share the same political and military fortunes regardless of country of origin. Likewise, the enemies of Muslims, be they Israeli, American, or Soviet, are all part of the non-Muslim—that is, Judeo-Christian or Zionist-Crusader—aggression against Muslims. The division of the world into believers and unbelievers is at the heart of global jihad's appeal for recruiting warriors of various nationalities to armed struggle against oppressors of Muslims anywhere. The declaration closes with a summation of the call for Muslims to cooperate for the sake of liberating Islam's holy places—Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem—as part of the effort to unify all Muslims under allegiance to God.

Audience

The Declaration of Jihad was presented in print in an Arabic daily published in London. It explicitly addresses the entire Muslim world, urging believers to respond to non-Muslim aggression against believers by waging jihad in defense of their rights. It also addresses the Muslims of Arabia in particular and therefore dwells on political and economic conditions in Saudi Arabia. References to dissident Saudi religious scholars and their efforts to persuade the government to undertake sweeping reforms resonated with the influential discourse of religious dissent that arose during the crisis over Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. A third, implicit audience would have been the regional circles of militants committed to jihad against secular regimes and non-Muslim oppressors. The declaration calls on them to join the fight against the far enemy as a more effective way to turn the tide in local struggles.

Impact

The Declaration of Jihad had limited immediate impact. Bin Laden had recently arrived in Afghanistan, which was witnessing the consolidation of the Taliban regime after years of civil war. The al Qaeda leader had to rebuild his organization in Afghanistan while plotting attacks on Western targets. The declaration's near-range impact, then, was to raise Bin Laden's profile in transnational Islamic militant

Essential Quotes

“The massacres that have taken place in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, the Philippines, Fatani, Ogaden, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya, and Bosnia-Herzegovina send shivers down our spines and stir up our passions. All this has happened before the eyes and ears of the world, but the blatant imperial arrogance of America, under the cover of the immoral United Nations, has prevented the dispossessed from arming themselves.”

(Paragraph 10)

“People are struggling even with the basics of everyday life, and everyone talks frankly about economic recession, price inflation, mounting debts, and prison overcrowding.”

(Paragraph 16)

“Brother Muslims in Saudi Arabia, does it make any sense at all that our country is the biggest purchaser of weapons from America in the world and America’s biggest trading partner in the region, while at the very same time the Americans are occupying Saudi Arabia and supporting—with money, arms, and manpower—their Jewish brothers in the occupation of Palestine and their murder and expulsion of Muslims there?”

(Paragraph 20)

“I say to our Muslim brothers across the world: your brothers in Saudi Arabia and Palestine are calling for your help and asking you to share with them in the jihad against the enemies of God, your enemies the Israelis and Americans.”

(Paragraph 22)

circles. His notions became part of debates among Muslim militants over the scope and targets of jihad. Most militants remained focused on local political struggles rather than converts to global jihad against the United States.

Two years later, al Qaeda’s first major terrorist operation, the 1998 attacks on American embassies in East Africa, would thrust Bin Laden to the forefront of the Islamic militant current. The United States reacted by launching cruise missile attacks on an al Qaeda base in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical company in Khartoum, Sudan, that Washington suspected of manufacturing bio-

logical weapons agents. These attacks failed to deter al Qaeda from pursuing jihad against the United States. In October 2000, an al Qaeda cell in Yemen attacked the USS *Cole* in Aden’s harbor by detonating a boat loaded with explosives next to the U.S. warship.

The chain of al Qaeda operations against the United States reached a climax on September 11, 2001, with the hijacking of four civilian airliners. In New York City, al Qaeda’s hijackers flew two airplanes into the World Trade Center’s twin towers, causing their collapse. In Washington, D.C., the hijackers flew an airplane into the Pentagon.



In the fourth airplane, passengers struggled with the hijackers, resulting in a crash landing in a field in western Pennsylvania. Almost three thousand people were killed in the four attacks, with the largest number perishing as the result of the collapse of the World Trade Center towers. The United States responded by invading Afghanistan a month later to expel al Qaeda from its havens and overthrow the Taliban regime that sheltered Bin Laden. Nevertheless, both groups survived and reorganized in Pakistan, and the idea of jihad against the United States remains a potent inspiration for Muslim militants.

Further Reading

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—David Commins

Questions for Further Study

1. In the early 1980s the United States seemed to be allied with Muslim forces in opposing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Yet in the 1990s the United States came to be regarded as the implacable enemy of Islam as conceived by people such as Osama bin Laden. Why did this realignment occur?

2. Many people argue that the concept of "jihad" as practiced by terrorists such as Osama bin Laden is actually a corruption of the concept. What is jihad, and why do some people believe that Bin Laden's vision of jihad is not consistent with the principles of Islam?

3. Compare this document with Ayatollah Khomeini's *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*. To what extent do the two documents express similar—or differing—visions of Islam and its place in the world?

4. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, Osama bin Laden became a despised figure in the United States, and U.S. military action in Afghanistan was focused in part on capturing him; as of 2010 he was still at large. Do you believe that if Bin Laden is eventually captured, the dynamic in the Middle East will change? How serious a blow would his capture be to Islamic militancy?

5. Do you believe that Islamic extremism would diminish if the Western powers simply withdrew from the Middle East? Or do you believe that Islamic extremists would simply find another reason to wage jihad against the West?



OSAMA BIN LADEN'S DECLARATION OF JIHAD AGAINST AMERICANS

Expel the Polytheists from the Arabian peninsula.

A Letter from Sheikh Osama bin Muhammad bin Laden to his Muslim Brothers across the world, and particularly those in the Arabian peninsula.

Praise be to God. We beseech Him for help and forgiveness. We seek refuge in God from the evil of our souls and our bad deeds. He whom God guides will not go astray, and he whom He leads astray can have no guide. I testify that there is no god but God alone, who has no partners. And I testify that Muhammad is His Servant and Prophet.

"You who believe, be mindful of God, as is His due, and make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment."

"People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of the severing of ties of kinship: God is always watching over you."

"Believers, be mindful of God, speak in a direct fashion and to good purpose, and He will put your deeds right for you and forgive you your sins. Whoever obeys God and His Messenger will truly achieve a great triumph."

Shu'ayb said: "I cannot succeed without God's help: I trust in Him, and always turn to Him."

Thanks be to God, who said: "[Believers], you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God."

And blessings and peace upon His Servant and Prophet, who said: "The people are close to an all-encompassing punishment from God if they see the oppressor and fail to restrain him."

It is no secret to you, my brothers, that the people of Islam have been afflicted with oppression, hostility, and injustice by the Judeo-Christian alliance and its supporters. This shows our enemies' belief that Muslims' blood is the cheapest and that their property and wealth is merely loot. Your blood has been spilt in Palestine and Iraq, and the horrific images of the massacre in Qana in Lebanon are still fresh in people's minds. The massacres that have taken place in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam,

the Philippines, Fatani, Ogaden, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya, and Bosnia-Herzegovina send shivers down our spines and stir up our passions. All this has happened before the eyes and ears of the world, but the blatant imperial arrogance of America, under the cover of the immoral United Nations, has prevented the dispossessed from arming themselves.

So the people of Islam realised that they were the fundamental target of the hostility of the Judeo-Crusader alliance. All the false propaganda about the supposed rights of Islam was abandoned in the face of the attacks and massacres committed against Muslims everywhere, the latest and most serious of which—the greatest disaster to befall the Muslims since the death of the Prophet Muhammad—is the occupation of Saudi Arabia, which is the cornerstone of the Islamic world, place of revelation, source of the Prophetic mission, and home of the Noble Ka'ba where Muslims direct their prayers. Despite this, it was occupied by the armies of the Christians, the Americans, and their allies.

I meet you today in the midst of this gloomy scenario, but also in light of the tremendous, blessed awakening that has swept across the world, and particularly the Islamic world. After the scholars of Islam underwent an enforced absence—enforced due to the oppressive Crusader campaign led by America in the fear that these scholars will incite our Islamic *umma* against its enemies, in the same way as did the pious scholars of old (God bless their souls) such as ibn Taymiyya and al-Izz ibn Abd al-Salam—this Judeo-Crusader alliance undertook to kill and arrest the righteous scholars and hardworking preachers. May God sanctify who He wishes. They killed the *mujahid* Sheikh Abdallah Azzam, they arrested Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in Jerusalem, and they killed the *mujahid* Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman in America, as well as arresting—on the advice of America—a large number of scholars, preachers and youth in Saudi Arabia. The most prominent of these were Sheikh Salman al-Auda and Sheikh Safar al-Hawali and their brothers.

This injustice was inflicted on us, too, as we were prevented from talking to Muslims and were hounded out of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, Sudan, and then Afghanistan. That is what led to this long absence of

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mine, but by the grace of God there became available a safe base in Khurasan, high in the peaks of the Hindu Kush, the very same peaks upon which were smashed, by the grace of God, the largest infidel military force in the world, and on which the myth of the great powers perished before the cries of the holy warriors: God is greatest!

And today, in the same peaks of Afghanistan, we work to do away with the injustice that has befallen our *umma* at the hands of the Judeo-Crusader alliance, especially after its occupation of Jerusalem and its appropriation of Saudi Arabia. We pray to God that He might bless us with victory—He is our protector and is well capable of doing so.

And so here we are today, working and discussing with each other to find ways of rectifying what has happened to the Islamic world generally and Saudi Arabia in particular. We need to study the appropriate paths to take in order to restore things to good order, and to restore to the people their rights after the considerable damage and harm inflicted on their life and religion. This has afflicted every section of society, whether civilian or military or security personnel, whether employees or merchants, young or old, university students, graduates or the unemployed, who now represent a broad section of society numbering hundreds of thousands. The situation in Saudi Arabia has begun to resemble a huge volcano that is about to explode and destroy unbelief and corruption, wherever it comes from. The two explosions in Riyadh and Khobar are merely warning signs pointing to this destructive torrent which is produced by bitter repression, terrible injustice, and the humiliating poverty that we see today.

People are struggling even with the basics of everyday life, and everyone talks frankly about economic recession, price inflation, mounting debts, and prison overcrowding. Low-income government employees talk to you about their debts in the tens or hundreds of thousands of riyals, whilst complaining that the riyal's value is declining dramatically. Domestic debts owed by the government to its citizens have reached 340 billion riyals, and are rising daily due to usurious interest, let alone all the foreign debt. People are wondering: are we really the biggest source of oil in the world? They feel that God is bringing this torture upon them because they have not spoken out against the regime's injustice and illegitimate behaviour, the most prominent aspects of which are its failure to rule in accordance with God's law, its depriving of legal rights to its servants, its permitting the American occupiers into Saudi Ara-

bia, and its arresting of righteous scholars—inheritors of the Prophet's legacy—and unjustly throwing them in prison. The regime has desecrated its legitimacy through many of its own actions, the most important being:

1. Its suspension of the rulings of the Islamic law and replacement thereof with man-made laws, and its entering into a bloody confrontation with the righteous scholars and pious youth. May God sanctify whom He pleases.

2. Its inability to protect the land and its allowing the enemies of God to occupy it for years in the form of the American Crusaders, who have become the principal reason for all aspects of our land's disastrous predicament.

The voices of the shadows have spoken up, their eyes uncovering the veil of injustice and their noses smelling the stench of corruption. The voices of reform have spoken up, calling for the situation to be put right: they have sent petitions, testimonies, and requests for reform. In the year 1411 AH, at the time of the Gulf War, a petition was sent to the king with around 400 signatures calling for reform in the country, but he made a mockery of them by completely ignoring their advice, and the situation went from bad to worse.

Brother Muslims in Saudi Arabia, does it make any sense at all that our country is the biggest purchaser of weapons from America in the world and America's biggest trading partner in the region, while at the very same time the Americans are occupying Saudi Arabia and supporting—with money, arms, and manpower—their Jewish brothers in the occupation of Palestine and their murder and expulsion of Muslims there? Depriving these occupiers of the huge returns they receive from their trade with us is a very important way of supporting the *jihad* against them, and we expect you to boycott all American goods. Men of the radiant future of our *umma* of Muhammad, raise the banner of *jihad* up high against the Judeo-American alliance that has occupied the holy places of Islam. God told his Prophet: "He will not let the deeds of those who are killed for His cause come to nothing; He will guide them and put them in a good state; He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them." And the Prophet said: "There are one hundred levels in Heaven that God has prepared for the holy warriors who have died for Him, between two levels as between the earth and the sky." And the *al-Jami al-Sahih* notes that the Prophet said: "The best martyrs are those who stay in the battle line and do not turn their faces away until

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they are killed. They will achieve the highest level of Heaven, and their Lord will look kindly upon them. When your Lord looks kindly upon a slave in the world, He will not hold him to account.” And he said: “The martyr has a guarantee from God: He forgives him at the first drop of his blood and shows him his seat in Heaven. He decorates him with the jewels of faith, protects him from the torment of the grave, keeps him safe on the day of judgment, places a crown of dignity on his head with the finest rubies in the world, marries him to seventy-two of the pure virgins of paradise and intercedes on behalf of seventy of his relatives,” as related by Ahmad al-Tirmidhi in an authoritative *hadith*.

I say to the youth of Islam who have waged *jihad* in Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina, with their financial, spiritual, linguistic, and scholarly resources, that the battle is not yet over. I remind them of what Gabriel said to the Prophet, after the battle of Ahzab: “When the Messenger of God, prayers and peace be upon him, departed to Medina and laid down his sword, Gabriel came to him and said: ‘You have laid down your sword? By God, the angels have not yet laid down their swords. Get up and go with whoever is with you to the Bani Qorayza, and I will go ahead of you to shake their fortresses and strike fear into them.’

So Gabriel went off, accompanied by his pageant of angels, the Prophet, and his holy warriors and helpers.” This is as it was told by al-Bukhari.

I say to our Muslim brothers across the world: your brothers in Saudi Arabia and Palestine are calling for your help and asking you to share with them in the *jihad* against the enemies of God, your enemies the Israelis and Americans. They are asking you to defy them in whatever way you possibly can, so as to expel them in defeat and humiliation from the holy places of Islam. God Almighty has said: “If they seek help from you against persecution, it is your duty to assist them.”

Cavalry of Islam, be mounted! This is a difficult time, so you yourselves must be tough. You should know that your coming-together and cooperation in order to liberate the holy places of Islam is the right step towards unification of the word of our *umma* under the banner of God’s unity. At this point we can only raise our palms humbly to ask God Almighty to provide good fortune and success in this matter.

Lord, bless your slave and messenger Muhammad, and his family and companions. Our final prayer is praise to God, Lord of the worlds.

Your brother in Islam,
Osama bin Muhammad bin Laden

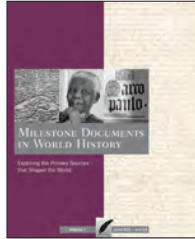
Glossary

al-Bukhari	Sahih al-Bukhari (810–870); compiler of one of the six canonical hadiths of Sunni Islam, the branch to which Bin Laden adheres
al-Jami al-Sahih	the work of Sahih al-Bukhari
Gulf War	in this context, the conflict often called the Persian Gulf War (August 2, 1990–February 28, 1991)
place of the revelation	the cave, located in present-day Saudi Arabia, where the Qur’an is said to have been revealed to Muhammad
Shu’ayb	a Muslim prophet of the BH (before hegira) period
umma	in this context, the community of Islamic believers; the Muslim world

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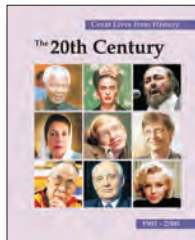
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