

Transcript of Osama Bin Ladin interview by Peter Arnett

The first-ever television interview with Osama Bin Ladin was conducted by Peter Arnett in eastern Afghanistan in late March 1997. Questions were submitted in advance. Bin Ladin responded to almost all of the questions. CNN was not allowed to ask follow up questions. The interview lasted just over an hour.

ARNETT: Mr. Bin Ladin, could you give us your main criticism of the Saudi royal Family that is ruling Saudi Arabia today?

MR. BIN LADIN: Regarding the criticisms of the ruling regime in Saudi Arabia and the Arabian peninsula, the first one is their subordination to the US. So, our main problem is the US government while the Saudi regime is but a branch or an agent of the US. By being loyal to the US regime, the Saudi regime has committed an act against Islam. And this, based on the ruling of Shari'a (Islamic jurisprudence), casts the regime outside the religious community. Subsequently, the regime has stopped ruling people according to what God revealed, praise and glory be to Him, not to mention many other contradictory acts. When this main foundation was violated, other corrupt acts followed in every aspect of the country, the economic, the social, government services and so on.



Osama bin Ladin

REPORTER: Mr. Bin Ladin, if the Islamic movement takes over Arabia, what kind of society will be created and will Saudi Arabia, for example, return to the laws of the Qur'an at the time of the Prophet?

BIN LADIN: We are confident, with the permission of God, Praise and Glory be to Him, that Muslims will be victorious in the Arabian peninsula and that God's religion, praise and glory be to Him, will prevail in this peninsula. It is a great pride and a big hope that the revelation unto Muhammad, Peace be upon him, will be resorted to for ruling. When we used to follow Muhammad's revelation, Peace be upon him, we were in great happiness and in great dignity, to God belong credit and praise.

REPORTER: Mr. Bin Ladin, if the Islamic movement takes over Saudi Arabia, what would your attitude to the West be and will the price of oil be higher?

BIN LADIN: We are a nation and have a long history, with the grace of God, Praise and Glory be to Him. We are now in the 15th century of this great religion, the complete and comprehensive methodology, has clarified the dealing between an individual and another, the duties of the believer towards God, Praise and Glory be to Him, and the relationship between the Muslim country and other countries in time of peace and in time of war. If we look back at our history, we will find there were many types of dealings between the Muslim nation and the other nations in time of peace and in time of war, including treaties and matters to do with commerce. So it is not a new thing that we need to come up with. Rather, it already, by the grace of God, exists. As for oil, it is a commodity that will be subject to the price of the market according to supply and demand. We believe that the current prices are not realistic due to the Saudi regime playing the role of a US agent and the pressures exercised by the US on the Saudi regime to increase production and flooding the market that caused a sharp decrease in oil prices.

REPORTER: Mr. Bin Ladin, you've declared a jihad against the United States. Can you tell us why? And is the jihad directed against the US government or the United States' troops in Arabia? What about US civilians in Arabia or the people of the United States?

BIN LADIN: We declared jihad against the US government, because the US government is unjust, criminal and tyrannical. It has committed acts that are extremely unjust, hideous and criminal whether directly or through its support of the Israeli occupation of the Prophet's Night Travel Land (Palestine). And we believe the US is directly responsible for those who were killed in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. The mention of the US reminds us before everything else of those innocent children who were dismembered, their heads and arms cut off in the recent explosion that took place in Qana (in Lebanon). This US government abandoned even humanitarian feelings by these hideous crimes. It transgressed all bounds and behaved in a way not witnessed before by any power or any imperialist power in the world. They should have been considerate that the qibla (Mecca) of the Muslims upheaves the emotion of the entire Muslim World. Due to its subordination to the Jews the arrogance and haughtiness of the US regime has reached, to the extent that they occupied the qibla of the Muslims (Arabia) who are more than a billion in the world today. For this and other acts of aggression and injustice, we have declared jihad against the US, because in our religion it is our duty to make jihad so that God's word is the one exalted to the heights and so that we drive the Americans away from all Muslim countries. As for what you asked whether jihad is directed against US soldiers, the civilians in the land of the Two Holy Places (Saudi Arabia, Mecca and Medina) or against the civilians in America, we have focused our declaration on striking at the soldiers in the country of The Two Holy Places. The country of the Two Holy Places has in our religion a peculiarity of its own over the other Muslim countries. In our religion, it is not permissible for any non-Muslim to stay in our country. Therefore, even though American civilians are not targeted in our plan, they must leave. We do not guarantee their safety, because we are in a society of more than a billion Muslims. A reaction might take place as a result of US government's hitting Muslim civilians and executing more than 600 thousand Muslim children in Iraq by preventing food and medicine from reaching them. So, the US is responsible for any reaction, because it extended its war against troops to civilians. This is what we say. As for what you asked regarding the American people, they are not exonerated from responsibility, because they chose this government and voted for it despite their knowledge of its crimes in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and in other places and its support of its agent regimes who filled our prisons with our best children and scholars. We ask that may God release them.

REPORTER: Mr. Bin Ladin, will the end of the United States' presence in Saudi Arabia, their withdrawal, will that end your call for jihad against the United States and against the US ?

BIN LADIN: The cause of the reaction must be sought and the act that has triggered this reaction must be eliminated. The reaction came as a result of the US aggressive policy towards the entire Muslim world and not just towards the Arabian peninsula. So if the cause that has called for this act comes to an end, this act, in turn, will come to an end. So, the driving-away jihad against the US does not stop with its withdrawal from the Arabian peninsula, but rather it must desist from aggressive intervention against Muslims in the whole world.

REPORTER: Mr. Bin Ladin, tell us about your experience during the Afghan war and what did you do during that jihad?

BIN LADIN: Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds, that He made it possible for us to aid the Mujahidin in Afghanistan without any declaration for jihad. It was rather the news that was broadcast by radio stations that the Soviet Union invaded a Muslim country. This was a sufficient motivation for me to start to aid our brothers in Afghanistan. I have benefited so greatly from the jihad in Afghanistan that it would have been impossible for me to gain such a benefit from any other chance and this cannot be measured by tens of years but rather more than that, Praise and Gratitude be to God. In spite of the Soviet power, we used to move with confidence and God conferred favors on us so that we transported heavy equipment from the country of the Two Holy Places (Arabia) estimated at hundreds of tons altogether that included bulldozers, loaders, dump trucks and equipment for digging trenches. When we saw the brutality of the Russians bombing Mujahidins' positions, by the grace of

God, we dug a good number of huge tunnels and built in them some storage places and in some others we built a hospital. We also dug some roads, by the grace of God, Praise and glory be to Him, one of which you came by to us tonight. So our experience in this jihad was great, by the grace of God, praise and glory be to Him, and the most of what we benefited from was that the myth of the super power was destroyed not only in my mind but also in the minds of all Muslims. Slumber and fatigue vanished and so was the terror which the US would use in its media by attributing itself super power status or which the Soviet Union used by attributing itself as a super power. Today, the entire Muslim world, by the grace of God, has imbibed the faithful spirit of strength and started to interact in a good manner in order to bring an end to occupation and the Western and American influence on our countries.

REPORTER: Mr. Bin Ladin, what was the significance of the Afgan war for the Islamic movement? Veterans of that war are fighting for Islamic movements and conflicts from the former Soviet republics such as Chechnya to Bosnia to Algeria. Can you explain that phenomemon to us?

BIN LADIN: As I mentioned in my answer to the previous question, the effect of jihad has been great not only at the level of the Islamic movement but rather at the level of the Muslim nation in the whole world. The spirit of power, dignity and confidence has grown in our sons and brothers for this religion and the power of God, Praise and Glory be to Him. And it has become apparent even to the Islamic movement that there is no choice but return to the original spring, to this religion, to God's Book, Praise and Glory be to Him, and to the sunna of His Prophet, Peace be upon him, as understood by our predecessors, may God be pleased with them. Of this, the acme of this religion is jihad. The nation has had a strong conviction that there is no way to obtain faithful strength but by returning to this jihad. The influence of the Afghan jihad on the Islamic world was so great and it necessitates that people should rise above many of their differences and unite their efforts against their enemy. Today, the nation is interacting well by uniting its efforts through jihad against the US which has in collaboration with the Israeli government led the ferocious campaign against the Islamic World in occupying the holy sites of the Muslims. As for the young men who participated in jihad here, their number, by the grace of God, was quite big, Praise and Gratitude be to Him, and they spread in every place in which non-believers' injustice is perpetuated against Muslims. Their going to Bosnia, Chechnya, Tajikistan and other countries is but a fulfillment of a duty, because we believe that these states are part of the Islamic World. Therefore, any act of aggression against any of this land of a span of hand measure makes it a duty for Muslims to send a sufficient number of their sons to fight off that aggression.

REPORTER: Can you tell us now about your expulsion from Saudi Arabia and your time you spent in Sudan and your arrival here in Afganistan?

BIN LADIN: I was, by the grace of God, Praise and Glory be to Him, in the great spot that is dear to God, Praise and Glory be to Him, al-hijaz, especially Venerable Mecca, where is God's Ancient House. However, the Saudi regime imposed on the people a life that does not appeal to the free believer. They wanted the people to eat and drink and celebrate the praise of God, but if the people wanted to encourage what is right and forbid what is wrong, they can't. Rather, the regime dismisses them from their jobs and in the event they continued to do so, they are detained in prisons. I have rejected to live this submissive life, by God's favor, Praise and Gratitude be to Him, that is not befitting of man let alone a believer. So, I waited for the chance until, God, Praise and Glory be to Him, has made it possible for me to leave the country of the Two Holy Places. I hope God, Praise and Glory be to Him, would confer upon me His favor to return one day when God's law rules in that country. I went to the Sudan and stayed there for about five years during which I visited Afghanistan and Pakistan to work against the Communist government in Kabul. When the Saudi government transgressed in oppressing all voices of the scholars and the voices of those who call for Islam, I found myself forced, especially after the government prevented Sheik Salman al-Awdah and Sheik Safar al-Hawali and some other scholars, to carry out a small part of my duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. So, I

collaborated with some brothers and established a committee for offering advice and we started to publish some declarations. (The Advice and Reformation Committee). However, the Saudi regime did not like this and started to exercise pressure on the Sudanese regime. The US government, the Egyptian government and the Yemeni government also helped in doing so. They requested me explicitly from the Sudanese regime and the pressure continued. Saudi Arabia dropped all of its conditions put to the Sudanese regime in return that I be driven out of the Sudan. The US government had already taken the same stance and pulled out its diplomatic mission from Khartoum and put forth their condition to return only after I have left. Unfortunately, the Sudanese government was in some difficult circumstances and there was a tendency inside the government that was inclined to reconciliation or surrender. Then, when they insisted initially that I should keep my mouth shut, I decided to look for a land in which I can breathe a pure, free air to perform my duty in enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. I ask God, Praise and Glory be to Him, for increase in prosperity for this great land, the Land of Khurasan (Afghanistan) in order to carry on this duty. So, we implore God, Praise and Glory be to Him, that He accept (our deeds) from us and the Muslims.

Now, the United States government says that you are still funding military training camps here in Afghanistan for militant, Islamic fighters and that you are a sponsor of international terrorism; but others describe you as the new hero of the Arab-Islamic world. Are these accusations true? How do you describe yourself?

BIN LADIN: After the collapse of the Soviet Union in which the US has no mentionable role, but rather the credit goes to God, Praise and Glory be to Him, and the Mujahidin in Afghanistan, this collapse made the US more haughty and arrogant and it has started to look at itself as a Master of this world and established what it calls the new world order. It wanted to delude people that it can do whatever it wants, but it can't do this. It leveled against me and others as many accusations as it desired and wished. It is these (accusations) that you mentioned. The US today as a result of the arrogant atmosphere has set a double standard, calling whoever goes against its injustice a terrorist. It wants to occupy our countries, steal our resources, impose on us agents to rule us based not on what God has revealed and wants us to agree on all these. If we refuse to do so, it will say you are terrorists. With a simple look at the US behaviors, we find that it judges the behavior of the poor Palestinian children whose country was occupied: if they throw stones against the Israeli occupation, it says they are terrorists whereas when the Israeli pilots bombed the United Nations building in Qana, Lebanon while was full of children and women, the US stopped any plan to condemn Israel. At the time that they condemn any Muslim who calls for his right, they receive the highest top official of the Irish Republican Army (Gerry Adams) at the White House as a political leader, while woe, all woe is the Muslims if they cry out for their rights. Wherever we look, we find the US as the leader of terrorism and crime in the world. The US does not consider it a terrorist act to throw atomic bombs at nations thousands of miles away, when it would not be possible for those bombs to hit military troops only. These bombs were rather thrown at entire nations, including women, children and elderly people and up to this day the traces of those bombs remain in Japan. The US does not consider it terrorism when hundreds of thousands of our sons and brothers in Iraq died for lack of food or medicine. So, there is no base for what the US says and this saying does not affect us, because we, by the grace of God, are dependent on Him, Praise and Glory be to Him, getting help from Him against the US. As for the last part of your question, we are fulfilling a duty which God, Praise and Glory be to Him, decreed for us. We look upon those heroes, those men who undertook to kill the American occupiers in Riyadh and Khobar (Dhahran). We describe those as heroes and describe them as men. They have pulled down the disgrace and submissiveness off the forehead of their nation. We ask Allah, Praise and Glory be to Him, to accept them as martyrs.

REPORTER: Let's go to the bombings of United States troops in Riyadh and Dhahran. Why did they happen and were you and your supporters involved in these attacks?

BIN LADIN: We ask about the main reason that called for this explosion. This explosion was a reaction to a US provocation of the Muslim peoples, in which the US transgressed in its aggression until it reached the qibla of the Muslims in the whole world. So, the purpose of of the two explosions is to get the American occupation out (of Arabia). So if the U.S. does not want to kill its sons who are in the army, then it has to get out.

Q: On the same issue of the American troops in Saudi Arabia, do you think will be more bombing attacks on them? or attacks on U.S. civilians in Arabia? or assassination attempts for example, on the Saudi royal families?

BIN LADIN: As for the previous question, the explosion of Riyadh and the one in Al-Khobar (Dhahran). It is no secret that during the two explosions, I was not in Saudi Arabia, but I have great respect for the people who did this action. I say, as I said before, they are heroes. We look upon them as men who wanted to raise the flag of "There is no God but Allah", and to put an end the non believers and the state of injustice that the U.S. brought. I also say that what they did is a great job and a big honor that I missed participating in.

Q) Do you think there will be more bombing attacks on American troops in Saudi Arabia? or attacks on American civilians in Saudi Arabia? or will there be assassination attempts on the Saudi Arabian ruling family?

BIN LADIN: It is known that every action has its reaction. If the American presence continues, and that is an action, then it is natural for reactions to continue against this presence. In other words, explosions and killings of the American soldiers would continue. These are the troops who left their country and their families and came here with all arrogance to steal our oil and disgrace us, and attack our religion. As for what was mentioned about the ruling (Saudi) family those in charge, do bear the full responsibility of everything that may happen. They are the shadow of the American presence. The people and the young men are concentrating their efforts on the sponsor and not on the sponsored. The concentration at this point of Jihad is against the American occupiers.

Q) What are your views about Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman and have you ever met him? Do you know him?

BIN LADIN: Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman is a Muslim scholar well-known all over the Muslim world. He represents the kind of injustice that is adopted by the U.S. A baseless case was fabricated against him even though he is a blind old man. We ask Allah, The Almighty, to relieve him. The U.S. sentenced him to hundreds of years just to please its caprice and the whims of the Egyptian regime. He is now very badly treated and in no way fit for an old man like him or any Muslim scholar.

Q) The U.S. State Department quoting a Pakistani official says that Ramzi Yousef, a convicted bomber in the World Trade Center in New York City stayed in the house you funded in Peshawar, Pakistan for those receiving training during the Afghan conflict after the Trade Center bombing, is that true? Did Ramzi Yousef stay in your house in Peshawar?

BIN LADIN: I do not know Ramzi Yousef. What the American government and Pakistani intelligence has been reporting is not true at all. But I say if the American government is serious about avoiding the explosions inside the U.S., then let it stop provoking the feelings of 1,250 million Muslims. Those hundreds of thousands who have been killed or displaced in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, do have brothers and relatives. They would make of Ramzi Yousef a symbol and a teacher. The U.S. will drive them to transfer the battle into the United States. Everything is made possible to protect the blood of the

American citizen while the bloodshed of Muslims is allowed in every place. With this kind of behavior, the U.S. government is hurting itself, hurting Muslims and hurting the American people.

Q) Mr. Bin Ladin, were you involved in financing the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City?

BIN LADIN: I have no connection or relation with this explosion.

Q) Mr. Bin Ladin, in a recent interview with an Arabic newspaper, you said that Arabs who fought in the Afghan war killed U.S. troops in Mogadishu, Somalia. Can you tell us about that?

BIN LADIN: The U.S. government went there with great pride and stayed there for some time with a strong media presence wanting to frighten people that it is the greatest power on earth. It went there with pride and with over 28,000 soldiers, to a poor unarmed people in Somalia. The goal of this was to scare the Muslim world and the whole world saying that it is able to do whatever it desires. As soon as the troops reached the Mogadishu beaches, they found no one but children. The CNN and other media cameras started photographing them (the soldiers) with their camouflage and heavy arms, entering with a parade crawling (on the ground) and showing themselves to the world as the "greatest power on earth". Resistance started against the American invasion, because Muslims do not believe the U.S. allegations that they came to save the Somalis. A man with human feelings in his heart does not distinguish between a child killed in Palestine or in Lebanon, in Iraq or in Bosnia. So how can we believe your claims that you came to save our children in Somalia while you kill our children in all of those places?

With Allah's grace, Muslims over there, cooperated with some Arab "Mujahideen" who were in Afghanistan. They participated with their brothers in Somalia against the American occupation troops and killed large numbers of them. The American administration was aware of that. After a little resistance, The American troops left after achieving nothing. They left after claiming that they were the largest power on earth. They left after some resistance from powerless, poor, unarmed people whose only weapon is the belief in Allah The Almighty, and who do not fear the fabricated American media lies. We learned from those who fought there, that they were surprised to see the low spiritual morale of the American fighters in comparison with the experience they had with the Russian fighters. The Americans ran away from those fighters who fought and killed them, while the latter were still there. If the U.S. still thinks and brags that it still has this kind of power even after all these successive defeats in Vietnam, Beirut, Aden, and Somalia, then let them go back to those who are awaiting its return.

Q) Mr. Bin Ladin, your family is a rich powerful family in Saudi Arabia. Have they, or the Saudi Arabian government asked you to stop your activities?

BIN LADIN: They have done that a lot. They have pressured us a lot, especially since a lot of our money is still in the hands of the Saudi ruling family due to activities of the our family and company (Saudi construction giant, the BinLadin Group). They sent me my mother, my uncle, and my brothers in almost nine visits to Khartoum (Sudan) asking me to stop and return to Arabia to apologize to King Fahd. I apologized to my family kindly because I know that they were driven by force to come to talk to me. This regime wants to create a problem between me and my family and in order to take some measures against them. But, with Allah's grace, this regime did not get its wish fulfilled. I refused to go back. They (my family) conveyed the Saudi government's message that if I did not go back, they'll freeze all my assets, deprive me of my citizenship, my passport, and my Saudi I.D. and distort my picture in the Saudi and foreign media. They think that a Muslim may bargain on his religion. I said to them do whatever you may wish. It is with Allah's bounty, we refused to go back. We are living in dignity and honor for whom we thank Allah. It is much better for us to live under a tree here on these

mountains than to live in palaces in the most sacred land to Allah, while being subjected to disgrace not worshipping Allah even in the most sacred land on earth, where injustice is so widespread. There is no strength except with Allah.

Q) Mr. Bin Ladin, have Saudi agents attempted to assassinate you? Are you targeted by the U.S. government? Are you in fact in fear of your life?

BIN LADIN: The U.S. pressures are no secret to you. The Saudi pressures are also in response to American pressures. There were several attempts to arrest me or to assassinate me. This has been going on for more than seven years. With Allah's grace, none of these attempts succeeded. This is a proof in itself to Muslims and to the world that the U.S. is incapable and weaker than the picture it wants to draw in people's mind. A believer must rest assured that life is only in the hands of Allah, and sustenance is also in the hands of Allah, the Almighty. As for fearing for one's life, it is difficult to explain to you how we think of ourselves, unless you have full belief. We believe that no one could take out one breath of our written life as ordained by Allah. We see that we see that getting killed in the cause of Allah is a great honor wished for by our Prophet (PBUH). He said in his Hadith: "I swear to Allah, I wish to fight for Allah's cause and be killed, I'll do it again and be killed, and I'll do it again and be killed". Being killed for Allah's cause is a great honor achieved by only those who are the elite of the nation. We love this kind of death for Allah's cause as much as you like to live. We have nothing to fear for. It is something we wish for.

Q) What are your future plans?

BIN LADIN: You'll see them and hear about them in the media, God willing.

Q) Mr. Bin Ladin, if you had an opportunity to give a message to President Clinton, what would that message be?

BIN LADIN: Mentioning the name of Clinton or that of the American government provokes disgust and revulsion. This is because the name of the American government and the name of Clinton and Bush directly reflect in our minds the picture of children with their heads cut off before even reaching one year of age. It reflects the picture of children with their hands cut off, the picture of the children who died in Iraq, the picture of the hands of the Isrealis with weapons destroying our children. The hearts of Muslims are filled with hatred towards the United States of America and the American president. The President has a heart that knows no words. A heart that kills hundreds of children definitely, knows no words. Our people in the Arabian Peninsula will send him messages with no words because he does not know any words. If there is a message that I may send through you, then it is a message I address to the mothers of the American troops who came here with their military uniform walking proudly up and down our land while the scholars of our country are thrown in prisons. I say that this represents an blatant provocation to 1,250 million Muslims. To these mothers I say if they are concerned for their sons, then let them object to the American government's policy and to the American president. Do not let themselves be cheated by his standing before the bodies of the killed soldiers describing the freedom fighters in Saudi Arabia as terrorists. It is he who is a terrorist who pushed their sons into this for the sake of the Isreali interest. We believe that the American army in Saudi Arabia came to separate between the Muslims and the people for not ruling in accordance with Allah's wish. They came to be in support of the Israeli forces in occupied Palestine, the land of the "Israa" of our Prophet (PBUH).