

INTRODUCTION

Bruce Lawrence

Although Osama bin Laden has become a legendary figure in the West, not to speak of the Arab world, the body of his statements has till now never been available to the public. Occasional fragments are cited, and—much more rarely—a few speeches have been reproduced here and there in the press. Yet official pressures have ensured that, for the most part, his voice has been tacitly censored, as if to hear it clearly and without cuts or interruption would be too dangerous. This does not mean that bin Laden's messages have reached no audience. But they have done so by flying below the radar screen of official—government and media—discourse about the war on terror, and entering an alternative sphere, till now largely confined to Arabic-speakers. Although his addresses are typically scriptural in mode, his rise to prominence mirrors the latest phase in the Information Age, the techniques of which he has in his own way proved a master. In a period of ten years that coincide with the emergence of a virtual universe, moving from print to internet, from wired to wireless communication around the globe, bin Laden and his associates have crafted a series of carefully staged statements designed for the new media. These include interviews with Western and Arab journalists, handwritten letters scanned onto discs, faxes, and audiotapes, and above all video recordings distributed via the first independent Arabic-language news outlet, the Qatari satellite television network al-Jazeera. These are the texts that make up this volume. For the first time they make possible informed critical discussion of bin Laden's outlook; they are no longer limited to the scrutiny of secretive government agencies and counter-terrorism experts.

To understand them, it is necessary to know something of the biography of their author. Osama bin Muhammad bin Laden was born in 1957 in Saudi

Arabia. His father was an illiterate Yemeni laborer from the Hadhramaut whose business acumen enabled him to secure building contracts for the Holy Sanctuaries, and to become a trusted confidant of the al-Saud family. When he died suddenly in 1968, Muhammad bin Laden left a fortune of \$11 billion to his 54 children, by twenty or more different women. Bin Laden's mother, who was Syrian, was quickly divorced by his father, and remarried to another Yemeni. His father died when he was ten. The young bin Laden attended the Management and Economics School at King Abd al-Aziz University in Jeddah. Though he was an indifferent business student, he took courses in Islamic studies taught by Abdallah Azzam and Muhammad Qutb that seem to have influenced him deeply. Azzam (1941-89) was a Muslim Brother from Palestine. He had studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo in the early 1970s, before moving to Jeddah in 1978. Muhammad Qutb was the younger brother of Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian thinker who became the most powerful voice of radical Islamic protest against both Arab nationalism and Western hegemony in the time of Nasser, and who was executed in 1966. Bin Laden dates his own political awakening from 1973, when an American airlift ensured Israeli victory over Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur War, and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia imposed a temporary oil embargo on the West.

After leaving university without having completed his degree, bin Laden entered his father's construction empire. He proved himself a successful manager of several of its businesses, and seems to have accumulated a sizeable personal fortune, though not as much as is often attributed to him. While still a very young man, he seems to have either volunteered or been picked by Riyadh to help organize the flow of Saudi funds and equipment to the *mujahidin* who had taken up arms against the Russian-backed regime in Afghanistan. He first arrived in Peshawar in 1980, on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, when he was only 23. There he worked with Azzam, contributing to his free circular *al-Jihad*, while also setting up his own operation in Peshawar, a guesthouse for Arab recruits to *jihad* against the Soviet Union. Called *Sijill al-Qaeda* or "Register of the Base," it was later known simply as *al-Qaeda* or "the Base." At this time, he cooperated closely with the Pakistani secret service or ISI (Inter-Service Intelligence Agency), and the CIA, the two other external patrons of the *mujahidin*. He may have been uneasy about his connection with the CIA—later he denied it altogether—but there is no contemporary evidence of his moral dilemma. With American and Saudi funds,

INTRODUCTION

and his own construction experience, he helped build mountain bases, including at the cave complex called Tora Bora, and training camps in the border regions. Later he seems to have fought courageously in battles around Jalalabad, as one of the many thousands of Arab volunteers in the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

When Russian troops pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, US funds were abruptly withdrawn. The battle-hardened Arab Afghans, largely split into national groups, were left orphaned and warring amongst each other in Peshawar. Only the training camps were to remain, used throughout the next decade by the ISI for Afghan and Kashmiri *jihadis*. In 1990 bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia. There, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait some months later, he offered to organize a fighting force of Arab Afghan veterans to defend the Kingdom against the threat from Iraq. The Saudi royal family not only rejected his proposal, but also invited half a million American and other foreign troops into the country to protect the dynasty. It was these "infidel" forces that launched Operation Desert Storm against Iraq. Their presence in the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries was blessed by leading Saudi *ulema*, including Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, Chief *Mufti* of the Kingdom, as well as the sheikh of al-Azhar in Cairo. Religious scholars and others who protested were harassed or jailed by the Saudi authorities. Bin Laden was among them. Under house arrest for a spell, he was able to leave the country for Sudan in 1991. He was still only 34.

For the next five years, bin Laden settled in a large, well-guarded compound outside Khartoum, under the protection of a Sudanese military regime which at that time was linked to the radical Islamist leader Hassan al-Turabi. Other Arab Afghans, including the Egyptian who was henceforward to be his most important associate, Ayman al-Zawahiri, joined bin Laden there. Although remaining active as a businessman in Sudan, bin Laden seems to have organized the arrival in Somalia of Arab Afghan veterans. He would later claim that it was they, the "true" *mujahidin*, who had delivered decisive blows against US forces that had arrived there under UN auspices in 1993, but were soon withdrawn after suffering humiliating setbacks. It is virtually certain that bin Laden was also attempting to organize underground opposition to the regime in Riyadh. The Saudi authorities tried to assassinate him several times, without success. In 1994 they stripped him of his citizenship. At the end of the year he responded with his first major public statement: an attack on the Grand

Mufti bin Baz's blessing of the Oslo Accords (Statement 1), released in London by the newly established Advice and Reform Committee, an expression of the indignation felt by radical Muslims at the "apostasy" of Arab rulers who were cooperating with the West.

Six months later, the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak narrowly escaped death in an ambush during a state visit to Ethiopia. When the organizers were traced to Sudan, Washington and Cairo added to the pressure already on Khartoum from Riyadh to expel bin Laden from the country. In May 1996, he and his entourage returned to Afghanistan, taking refuge in the Tora Bora mountains, north of Jalalabad. In September, the Taliban captured Kabul and over the next two years imposed, with Pakistani support, the most unified rule the country had known since the fall of Afghan Communism. Enjoying mutually respectful, if not always warm relations, with the Taliban regime, bin Laden set about organizing the resources, finance, training, and safe havens needed in which to reassemble young fighters for the defense of Islam, as he saw it. At the same time he sought to project his aims to a wider audience, conceding interviews and proclaiming the creation of a World Islamic Front in conjunction with al-Zawahiri and two leading Pakistani Islamists in early 1998 (Statement 6). Six months later, simultaneous bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania left more than 200 dead and many more injured, with massive loss of life. This was the first major terrorist action indisputably traceable to bin Laden. The Clinton Administration dismissed proposals to have him extradited from Afghanistan. Instead, they launched a cruise missile attack on one of his bases in Khost in August 1998, seeking but failing to kill him. He was now world-famous. Three years later, al-Qaeda activists hijacked four planes in the United States and in suicide missions destroyed the World Trade Center, and severely damaged the Pentagon, killing 3,000 people, most of them Americans.

It was not until 2004 that bin Laden publicly acknowledged his role in planning and organizing the attacks of 9/11 (Statement 23), but from the start few doubted that he was the author of this epochal act of terrorism. The Bush Administration's response was not long in coming. A month later, Operation Enduring Freedom unleashed the heaviest bombing assault on any country since World War Two, flattening Taliban resistance and facilitating the conquest of Afghanistan by US proxies. Bin Laden, the prime target of the campaign, escaped capture, as did the Taliban leader Mullah Omar. In places of deep

hiding somewhere along the Pakistani-Afghan border, he has continued to defy all attempts to find him, despite a \$50 million bounty on his head and massive sweeps by Pakistani and US forces. The capacity of the loose network of affiliates emanating from al-Qaeda to act outside the Arab world has been greatly weakened, but not extinguished, as the bombings in Madrid of February 2004 and in London of July 2005 have shown. Within the Middle East, on the other hand, the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq has created a fertile recruitment ground for bin Laden's conception of *jihād* against the West. Though physically cut off from the battlefields of Mesopotamia, his voice resounds across them through audiocassettes and satellite TV, apparently inspiring many of the most ferocious attacks on the occupiers and their local allies. Still a fugitive somewhere in the Hindu Kush, he has released a series of messages to the people of Iraq, the nations of Europe, and the citizens of the United States. Many of them are reproduced and freshly translated in this volume. Collectively they underscore that Osama bin Laden remains a force to be reckoned with.

But what kind of a force? We have only glimpses of bin Laden's personality, and much remains mysterious about the man. It is clear that few of his early associates saw him as a potential leader. The newly appointed Saudi ambassador to Washington recalls him as "a very shy person, very self-effacing, extremely sparse in his words and generally a do-gooder."¹ But is it possible that something of the spirit of his father moved him from the start? Muhammad bin Laden had risen from nothing to untold wealth in the shadow of the newly petro-rich Saudis, in a career that must have involved many a gamble. Bin Laden would prove himself as much a risk-taker as his father, but in another way. Coming out of the shadow of docile Muslims, within a world order dominated by the West, he rallied fellow-believers in the pursuit not of fortune but of *jihād*, beyond all the allures of prosperity, professionalism, or familial comfort. In that cause, he must have inherited some of his father's practical gifts. Already in his twenties he seems to have been a capable manager, at the head of a large construction complex, applying natural organizational skills he would later use to channel Saudi money and matériel to Afghanistan. The creation of an international network of sacrificial activists and the complex logistical planning of 9/11, in conjunction with his small group of associates, can be regarded as the culminating achievements of this side of bin Laden.

1 "Questions for Prince Turki al-Faisal," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 28 2005, p. 11.

But these organizational gifts alone, magnified as they were by the ample financial resources at his disposal, would never have given him the position he now enjoys in the Muslim world. That is due to other human qualities. Bin Laden is not an original thinker. Most of his ideas stem from writings by early mentors, in particular Abdallah Azzam's *Defending the Land of the Muslims is Each Man's Most Important Duty*, which, published in Peshawar in 1985, laid down a comprehensive case for individual *jihad* against the West. Nor is bin Laden an outstanding Qur'anic scholar: he lacks the command of textual subtleties that mark Wahhabi exegetes in Arabia, or their Azhari counterparts in Cairo. Yet he is well versed in the classical scriptures and traditions of Islam, and uses them to great advantage. He moves easily in the Qur'an as a book of day-to-day guidance, a source from which even the illiterate can draw strength both as pious Muslims and as advocates of radical change within the world they uneasily inhabit with other, less committed believers. This level of learning, real if not exceptional, provides the basis of religious authority for his pronouncements. What gives these their unique force, however, are his literary gifts. Bin Laden has earned many labels by now—fanatic, nihilist, fundamentalist, terrorist—but what actually distinguishes him, among a host of those described in these ways, is that he is first and foremost a *polemist*. The many different statements collected in this book are nearly all constructed as arguments with real or imagined opponents and interlocutors.

Polemical arguments are tactical—"talking for victory," as Boswell put it of Johnson. They will cut corners with logic or evidence, as bin Laden frequently does, though they cannot go too far without risking loss of their power to move or persuade. Bin Laden's polemics, moreover, have to be understood within a set of Islamic genres unfamiliar in the West. They draw, as the linguistic anthropologist Flagg Miller has remarked, on at least five types of Muslim public discourse: the declaration, the juridical decree, the lecture, the written reminder, and the epistle. Bin Laden is not concerned to obey the rules of each genre, but weaves fluently back and forth between them. It is this capacity for rhetorical manoeuvre, argues Miller, that "enables bin Laden to legitimate himself in relation to different traditions of religious authority."² If his decrees

2 W Flagg Miller, "On the summit of the Hindu Kush: Osama bin Laden's Declaration of War reconsidered," talk delivered at the University of Michigan in March 2005; cited by permission of the author.

are more formulaic and general in tone, his declarations and epistles address specific groups—not only followers or foes in the Muslim world, but Europeans or Americans as well, as will be found below. In each case, there is an adjustment of the polemical register to the particular audience for whom the message is intended. Common to all these messages is the literary skill with which they are composed. Not everything in them has necessarily been written by bin Laden himself: there is reason to believe that in some cases other hands may have contributed to the final text. But what is crystal-clear is that these messages are not ghostwritten tracts of the kind supplied by professional speechwriters to many politicians in the West, whether American Presidents, European Prime Ministers, or their Middle-Eastern counterparts. They speak in the authentic, compelling voice of a visionary, with what can only be called a powerful lyricism. Bernard Lewis, no friend of radical Islam, describes a typical message published below as “a magnificent piece of eloquent, at times even poetic Arabic prose.”³ Bin Laden’s standing in the Muslim world is inseparable from these literary gifts.

Beyond the organizer and the polemicist lies, finally, the hero. To Westerners for whom bin Laden is the incarnation of villainy, this may seem the last word in perversity. But for millions of Muslims around the world, including many who have no sympathy with terrorism, bin Laden is an heroic figure. His worldwide charisma is based not just on his success in so far eluding Americans and their allies, exhilarating as that may be for many ordinary Muslims. It is because his personal reputation for probity, austerity, dignity, and courage contrasts so starkly with the mismanagement, bordering on incompetence, of most Arab regimes. Unlike the latter, bin Laden has demonstrated that he can forego the temptations of wealth, that he dares to strike powerful wrongdoers, and that he refuses to bend before superior might. “Bin Laden is seen by millions of his co-religionists—because of his defense of Islam, personal piety, physical bravery, integrity and generosity—as an Islamic hero, as that faith’s ideal type, and almost as a modern-day Saladin,” reports Michael Scheuer, head of the CIA unit charged with hunting bin Laden. “For nearly a decade now,” observes Scheuer, “bin Laden has demonstrated patience, brilliant planning, managerial expertise, sound strategic and tactical sense, admirable character traits, eloquence, and focused, limited war aims. He has never, to my knowledge, behaved or spoken

3 Bernard Lewis, “License to Kill,” *Foreign Affairs*, November–December 1998.

in a way that could be described as 'irrational in the extreme.'⁴ Indeed, for all the terror sown by his actions, concludes Scheuer, "there is no reason, based on the information at hand, to believe bin Laden is anything other than what he appears: a pious, charismatic, gentle, generous, talented, and personally courageous Muslim. As a historical figure, viewed from any angle, Osama bin Laden is a great man, one who smashed the expected unfolding of universal post-cold war peace."⁴ These encomia express, no doubt, the not uncommon admiration felt by a professional for a particularly skilled enemy—with the kind of overstatement to be found, for example, in writings of the British military historian Liddell Hart about German generals in World War Two. Yet even discounting their hyperbole, such CIA tributes are striking; they provoke further reflection on the man behind the many personae.

How are such eulogies, from friend and foe alike, to be reconciled with the actions for which bin Laden has been responsible? Is the West wrong to call him a terrorist? His messages make it clear that, by his own admission, the answer is no. Bin Laden freely concedes that he has practised terror. What the messages invariably go on to say, however, is that this is a reactive terror—a response to what he perceives as the much greater terror exercised by the West over an incomparably longer period of time. Definitions of terrorism vary widely: it is well known that many who are now hailed as freedom fighters in their own communities, and accepted as respectable statesmen by the powers that be, were once denounced as terrorists, responsible for killing innocent civilians—Israeli leaders like Begin and Sharon prominent among them. In this sense, bin Laden's principal innovation has been to organize terrorist actions thousands of miles away from the territories he seeking to liberate. But this, he insists, is itself only retaliation for innumerable prior acts of aggression by the West in the Muslim world, thousands of miles away from Christian homelands. For 200 years now, the *umma* (Islamic global community, or supernational), has been under attack, from the first French invasion of Egypt in the last years of the 18th century and the seizure of the Maghreb in the 19th century, the British grab for Egypt and the Italian for Libya, the carve-up of the whole Middle East by Britain and France at the end of World War One, the sponsorship of Jewish colonization of Palestine, the suborning of nominally independent rulers in the Arabian peninsula, down to contemporary American control of the entire region.

4 Anonymous (Michael Scheuer), *Imperial Hubris* (Potomac, 2004), pp. 104, 114, 168, 103.

Is this an exaggerated description of the unbalanced relationship between the West and the Muslim world? There are no Arab military bases in Texas or California, no Arab contract mercenaries stationed in Britain or France, no Arab fleets in the Gulf of Mexico, no Arab-sponsored schemes of forcible settlement in the Mid-West. All the lines of intrusion and violence historically run in one direction. Yet such aggression does not condone bin Laden's acts of terror; they are abhorrent not only to Westerners, but also to many Arabs. Yet in the Middle East, few can forget the much heavier loss of life caused by centuries of Western domination. Bin Laden's victims number perhaps 5,000—about half as many as the number of civilians said to have died under American bombs in Afghanistan. As he never ceases to point out, the West has killed far larger numbers in the region within living memory. The liberal use of poison gas and aerial strafing of Iraqi villages by Winston Churchill in the 1920s, the crushing of the Palestinian uprising of the 1930s, France's colonial war in Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s, have been followed now by deaths through malnutrition and disease inflicted on the children of Iraq in the 1990s, due to UN sanctions. Bin Laden, ever alert to the principle of reciprocity, dwells insistently on the enormity of Iraq's suffering. He exaggerates its size: starting with 600,000 victims, he ends with 1.5 million, while the real figure was nearer 300,000. Yet he is correct about the staggering disproportion in the numbers of those killed on both sides. "Because you have killed," he warns Westerners, "we must kill. Your innocents are not less innocent than ours." Few things he has said are as chilling as Madeleine Albright's statement that this massacre of the innocents was "worth it" to the West. Even though nothing can ever justify bin Laden's own retaliatory killing of innocents, the indifference of Western leaders to the atrocities committed against Muslims helps explain why, despite widespread revulsion at his use of terror, he continues to be so admired and even trusted by ordinary people in the Middle East.⁵

Should bin Laden then be described as a contemporary anti-imperialist fighter adaptive to the Information Age? This is the view of one of the most level-headed of sociologists, Michael Mann. He writes: "Despite the religious

⁵ The Pew Trust Global Attitudes survey released on June 23 2005 found that while Muslims are worried about the consequences for themselves of the war on terror, a surprising number still have confidence in bin Laden's conduct in world affairs. The sixteen nations covered in the survey included neither Saudi Arabia nor Iraq, where the extent of support for him was likely to be much greater than in the countries surveyed.

MESSAGES TO THE WORLD

rhetoric and the bloody means, bin Laden is a rational man. There is a simple reason why he attacked the US: American imperialism. As long as America seeks to control the Middle East, he and people like him will be its enemy.²⁶ The kernel of good sense in this judgment is plain. Objectively speaking, bin Laden is waging a war against what many—admirers as well as critics—now call the American empire. But it is crucial to note that he himself never uses this vocabulary. The word “imperialism” does not occur once in any of the messages he has sent out. He defines the enemy differently. For him, *jihad* is aimed not at an imperium, but at “global unbelief”. Again and again, his texts return to this fundamental dichotomy. The war is a religious war. It subsumes a political war, which he can wage with terms appropriate to it, as he demonstrates in his addresses to the peoples of Europe or of America. Yet the battle in the end is one of faith.

Does this matter, or is it just a question of vocabulary? For some, bin Laden's use of Qur'anic authority for his struggle is little more than a convenient mask, disguising the reality that al-Qaeda is actually an Arab version of the Red Brigades or the ultra-left groups that practised terrorism in Europe in the 1970s—their lineal successor, so to speak. This view is not convincing. Of the intensity of bin Laden's piety there can be no doubt. What is more controversial is his orthodoxy. His critics have from the beginning charged him with selective use of the Qur'an and Traditions, for purposes incompatible with the intention of God's Word or the teaching of His Prophet. Certainly, it is difficult to find in his writings any hint of the traditional Islamic values of generosity, hospitality, and tolerance. But it is also true that everything he has written falls within the framework of a reaction against aggression, for which he has strong scriptural support. Islamic jurisprudence distinguishes between offensive war (*harb*), a campaign of conquest launched under official leadership against the land of the impious, and defensive struggle (*jihad*), to be waged as a matter of individual obligation by all Muslims when the *umma* has come under attack. In the latter case it is the *dicta* of the 14th-century Syrian jurist ibn Taimiyya, who rallied the faithful against the terrifying scourge of the Mongol invasions, which provide the most authoritative guide for conduct. His *fatwa* reads: “the first obligation after the (profession of) Faith is to repel the enemy aggressors who assault both sanctity and security.”

INTRODUCTION

Taking this injunction seriously, bin Laden points to passages in the Qur'an that he reads as authorizing a generalized *lex talionis*, one capable of covering even the killing of innocent infidels in revenge for the killing of innocent believers. In much the same way, he invokes a lethal Prophetic Tradition against the Jews, and less ferocious but still hostile passages in the Qur'an, when dealing with modern Israel. It would be wrong either to dismiss these references as imaginary, or to take them as representative of contemporary Muslim opinion. From everything we know about the best Muslim political theorists, it is conceivable that some of them might also have called for a *jihad* to expel infidels from the Land of the Holy Places. Yet such a select reading of scriptural sources and extra-scriptural authority sits ill with the conscience of the great majority of contemporary Muslims: for all but a few, implacable warfare in the name of *jihad* is not the sole or the best measure of Islamic loyalty.

What then are the prospects of the cause for which bin Laden is prepared to lay down his own life? It is clear that what originally launched him on his hugely ambitious undertaking was the confidence instilled by the victory of the *mujahidin* over the Red Army in Afghanistan, followed by the withdrawal of American forces from Somalia in 1993. If one superpower could be defeated, and even ultimately destroyed, by warriors for the faith, why should not the other, which had proved much less resilient in Mogadishu? This dream was based on two great miscalculations. Like many revolutionaries—the Russians after 1917, the Cubans after 1959—bin Laden and his associates ignored the special conditions that had given them victory in one society, imagining it could be reproduced with the same tactics in other societies. But Afghanistan was like no other country of the Middle East: it was economically and culturally much less developed, ethnically more divided, geographically much more inaccessible, with unique traditions of mountain warfare and resistance to the invader. Even so, it required massive amounts of US finance and weaponry, and the full backing of the Pakistani state, for the *mujahidin* to prevail. Bin Laden's reluctance to admit the scale of this assistance, visible in the interviews below, meant that he later overestimated the ability of the Taliban, isolated from any external support, to withstand the subsequent American assault. The Afghan experience could not be mechanically repeated elsewhere; it was more vulnerable in itself than he had imagined. As for Somalia, the inconsequential American landings there, more a public relations than strategic operation, were no gauge of the powers of the Pentagon. The

effect of both Afghanistan and Somalia seems to have been simply to lure him into illusions of US fickleness and weakness.

Connected to these miscalculations is the nature of his religious vision itself. One of its most striking features, displayed throughout the texts in this book, is the absence of any social dimension. Bin Laden was barred from the kind of analysis that would have allowed him to distinguish the different structural features of the various Muslim societies in which *jihad* was to be awakened, and made him hesitate in inflecting the notion of "One, Two, Three, Many Afghans." Morally, he does denounce a host of evils. Some of them—unemployment, inflation, and corruption—are social. But no alternative conception of the ideal society is ever offered. There is an almost complete lack of any social program. This alone makes it clear how distinctive al-Qaeda is as a phenomenon. The lack of any set of social proposals separates it not just from the Red Army Faction or the Red Brigades, with which it has sometimes mistakenly been compared, but—more significantly—from the earlier wave of radical Islamism, whose leading thinker was the great iconoclast Sayyid Qutb. In place of the social, there is a hypertrophy of the sacrificial. Bin Laden's messages rarely hold out radiant visions of final triumph. His emphasis falls far more on the glories of martyrdom than the spoils of victory. Rewards belong essentially to the hereafter. This is a creed of great purity and intensity, capable of inspiring its followers with a degree of passion and principled conviction that no secular movement in the Arab world has ever matched. At the same time, it is obviously also a narrow and self-limiting one: it can have little appeal for the great mass of believers, who need more than scriptural dictates, poetic transports, or binary prescriptions to chart their everyday lives, whether as individuals or as collective members of a community, local or national. Above all, there is no rush to restore a Caliphate today. Bin Laden seems at some level to recognize the futility of a quest for restitution. He sets no positive political horizon for his struggle. Instead, he vows that *jihad* will continue until "we meet God and get his blessing!"

Despite these crippling weaknesses, the force of bin Laden's appeal is far from spent. The reason for that is very clear. Not only has the West's long-term abuse of the Middle East, which gives his movement its moral power, not been in any way amended since he began his struggle. It has now been virulently aggravated by the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq, visiting biblical humiliation, destruction, and chaos on the third most hallowed land of the

umma (after Mecca/Medina and Jerusalem). If ordinary Muslims doubted the designs ascribed to the West by bin Laden before the invasion of March 2003, and all that has followed, considerably fewer are likely to do so today. In the infernal landscape created by the shattering of Iraq, dedicated fighters inspired by his summons proliferate to carry out deadly suicide missions, alongside a nationalist resistance which has learnt to cooperate with them. The ranks of *jihadis* are being replenished with every week that American forces and their allies remain. Can the carnage cease until they are driven out or devise a face-saving way to retreat?

Bin Laden's own fate remains uncertain. Unless he dies a natural death in hiding, it seems inevitable that sooner or later his hunter will catch him. If captured alive, he will doubtless be killed on the spot, as Che Guevara was forty years ago. His captors will know that it would be useless to torture him for information, as they have his lieutenants; while to put him on trial would risk huge embarrassment for those attempting to judge him, given his powers of eloquence and their own record. He is not troubled by the predictability of this end:

So let me be a martyr,
dwelling in a high mountain pass
among a band of knights who,
united in devotion to God,
descend to face armies.

This poem, which concludes his Sermon for the Feast of the Sacrifice (Statement 19), could be bin Laden's epitaph.

His posthumous legend will live on, like that of Guevara, to inspire other such knights, until such time as different, more humane heroes can attract the idealism of Muslim youth, and find a better way not only to liberate their homelands but also to forge a brighter future for those liberated.