

# My weekend with Osama bin Laden

'Having borne arms against the Russians in Afghanistan for 10 years, we think our battle with the Americans will be easy by comparison'

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Abdul Bari Atwan  
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**Abdul Bari Atwan:** In your recent message [to the world's Muslims] you declared jihad against the US forces, and called for a boycott of American goods. Many people expected further operations like that at al-Khobar [the bombing of an American barracks in Saudi Arabia], but this hasn't happened.

**Osama bin Laden:** Military people are not unaware that preparations for major operations take a certain amount of time, unlike minor operations. If we wanted small actions, the matter would have been easily carried out immediately after the statement. [But] the nature of the battle calls for operations of a specific type that will make an impact on the enemy, and this of course calls for excellent preparation.

We saw the Riyadh and al-Khobar bombing as a sufficient signal for people of intelligence among American decision-makers to avoid the real battle between the nation of Islam and the American forces, but it seems that they didn't understand the signal.

**ABA:** What was it intended to signify?

**OBL:** If they understood the signal it would mean withdrawing all troops from the region. We believe the American government has committed the greatest mistake in entering a peninsula that no religion from among the non-Muslim nations has entered for 14 centuries, despite the presence of imperialist troops in the region. They were all too awestruck to enter the region of the two holy places and remained on the edges, such as in Yemen and Oman.

The British and others used to respect the feelings of more than a billion Muslims, and therefore did not occupy the land of the two holy places, and America's interests were

not harmed by it not entering it. The oil was sold to it - we are not going to drink it - and they were still able to impose a policy that depressed prices to an ideal level.

Their arrival [on the Arabian peninsula] was an aberration and a reckless act, for it brought them into confrontation with a nation numbering a billion Muslims.

**ABA:** You were silent for a long time then suddenly decided to re-emerge, having had a comfortable stay in Sudan. What was the turning point at which you had to take responsibility for this great opposition?

**OBL:** I had decided myself, after the Saudi government clamped down on the country's ulema [religious scholars] - dismissing them from posts in universities and mosques, and banning distribution of their tapes, virtually preventing them from speaking - that I would start saying what was right and denouncing what was wrong.

I issued statements from Sudan, and when the Saudi government realised the big impact they were having, and how effective they were, it overcame all its differences with the Sudanese regime, which had been making great efforts to improve relations with Riyadh, only to have them arrogantly rebuffed.

Then, after statement 17, which was an open letter to the king [Fahd] on the occasion of the cabinet reshuffle, the Saudi government contacted its Sudanese counterparts at the highest levels and asked to make their peace with them.

With God's help we returned to the land of Khorasan [an old name for the area covering today's Afghanistan], where we have security and dignity, far away from the humiliations visited on our brothers in our country.

**ABA:** Did you go to Sudan at the invitation of the government or some other party?

**OBL:** I went on my own initiative without an invitation.

**ABA:** Did you expect the Saudi government to take the step of demanding your departure?

**OBL:** There was always that possibility, and so we were arranging alternatives such as Afghanistan, and therefore kept our camps there.

**ABA:** Did you fight the Americans in Somalia?

**OBL:** The only non-Somali faction to fight the Americans was the Arab mujahedin brothers who were in Afghanistan. So the war we are waging with America is not the first, and we pray to God to give us victory over them as previously.

We were surprised by the [low] level of morale of the American troops in the Somalia war. There was nothing that they were fighting for except media glory.

There was no comparison between them and the Russian combatants we fought in Afghanistan, who were braver and more patient than their American counterparts. Having borne arms against the Russians in Afghanistan for 10 years, we think our battle with the Americans will be easy by comparison and we are now more determined to carry on until we see the face of God.

**ABA:** There were reports, after the Taliban movement took power in Kabul, that your presence as Afghan Arabs was no longer wanted. Is this true?

**OBL:** Our relations with the Taliban are excellent... and we feel completely satisfied with the cooperation with them.

**ABA:** If you fell out with the Taliban, for whatever reason, would you return to Sudan?

**OBL:** I can't go back to Sudan, not because I want to have nothing to do with Sudan, but because our natural place is in the mountains.

**ABA:** What about Iraq?

**OBL:** Iraq is not an option. The choice is between Afghanistan and Yemen. The geography of Yemen is mountainous and its people are armed tribespeople. It allows one to breathe clean air without humiliation.

**ABA:** With or without the knowledge of the Yemeni government?

**OBL:** Either.

**ABA:** Soon, do you think?

**OBL:** I don't think in the foreseeable future.

**ABA:** Have you thought of seeking asylum in Europe like others? And have you visited London, in particular, either secretly or openly?

**OBL:** I would rather die than settle in any European state. But some Arab governments spread such rumours to discredit me. It is better for Muslims not to settle in non-Muslim societies. And it is not true that I contemplated going to London or obtaining a visa. The purpose of such rumours is to tarnish [my reputation].