

TO THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ

February 11 2003

From the autumn of 2002 onwards, it became increasingly clear that the United States was preparing to invade Iraq and overthrow the Ba'ath regime, and that it would be seconded by Britain. Five weeks before the assault was finally launched, the first of three messages from bin Laden to the Iraqi people, consisting of a sixteen minute-long audiotape, was delivered to al-fazeera, and immediately broadcast. It appears to have been issued in response to appearances on al-fazeera by leading figures of the Bush administration, including Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld. Although al-Jazeera broadcast the message within hours of receiving it, Washington seems to have known about the tape in advance, for shortly before the letter was aired, Secretary of State Powell told a Senate panel that a tape that al-fazeera was about to broadcast was evidence of bin Laden's partnership with Iraq.'

Condemning in advance the invasion of Iraq, which he predicts will combine massive air strikes and a non-stop propaganda campaign, bin Laden encourages the population to resist by recounting in detail the defensive tactics that enabled him and his fellow-fighters to survive the saturation bombing of their redoubts in the Tora Bora mountains in December 2001. But in Iraq, he writes, "what the enemy fears most is urban and street warfare, in which heavy and costly human losses can be expected". Insisting on "the importance of dragging the enemy into a protracted, exhausting, close combat, making the most of camouflaged defense positions in plains, farms, hills, and cities", he also stresses the capacity of "martyrdom operations" to inflict "unprecedented harm" on the enemy. These prescriptions describe with remarkable accuracy the tactics that would be successfully adopted by much of the Iraqi resistance from the summer of 2003 onwards.

In the great new battle that is imminent, bin Laden excoriates the Arab leaders who act as accomplices to America, declaring them hypocrites and apostates who have put themselves outside the community of Islam: "It is permissible to take their money and their blood." The Saudi rulers,

though nervous of the upcoming war, had in fact already closed a number of airports near the Iraqi border to civilian aircraft so they could be secretly used by the US military. Muslims must rise up and free themselves from such traitorous tyrants. Bin Laden singles out six countries as most urgently in need of liberation—three monarchies, Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, and three military dictatorships—Pakistan, Nigeria, and Yemen. His reasons for excluding Egypt and the Gulf sheikhdoms, for him equally logical targets, are unclear. In Iraq itself, Muslims can fight with a good conscience alongside Ba'athists, however atheist they may be, against the common enemy—since socialist mlers are finished anyway, whether in Aden or Baghdad, just as there was once a convergence of interests, which did no harm to the faith, between Muslims and Persians in fighting Byzantines, so the resistance of the devout to Americans in Iraq should have no compunction in joining forces with loyalists of the fallen regime to expel them.

Peace be with you and all God's mercy and blessings.

"You who believe, be mindful of God, as is His due, and make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment."²

We are following with intense interest and concern the Crusaders' preparations for war to occupy one of Islam's former capitals,³ loot Muslims' riches, and install a stooge government to follow its masters in Washington and Tel Aviv, like the other treacherous puppet Arab governments, to pave the way for the establishment of Greater Israel. "God is enough for us; He is the best protector."⁴ In the midst of this corrupt, unjust war that the infidels of America are waging with their agents and allies, we would like to emphasize a number of important values:

First, sincerity of will, and fighting for the one God, who has no equal, rather than for any particular ethnic group or any of the pagan regimes so common in the Arab countries, including Iraq. God Almighty said: "The believers fight for God's cause, while those who reject faith fight for an unjust cause. Fight the allies of Satan: Satan's strategies are truly weak."⁵

² Qur'an, 3:102.

³ Baghdad was founded on July 30 762 by the Abbasids, replacing Damascus as the capital of a Muslim Empire stretching from North Africa to Persia. Within a generation, it was one of the largest, most cosmopolitan cities in the world; by the 9th century, its population was between 300,000-500,000.

⁴ Qur'an, 3:173.

⁵ Qur'an, 12:21.

Second, we remind you that victory comes only with God. All we need to do is prepare and motivate *for jihad*. God Almighty said: "You who believe! If you help God, He will help you and make you stand firm."⁶ We must be quick to seek repentance from God for our sins, especially the grave ones. As God's Prophet said: "Avoid the seven deadly sins: associating others with God, sorcery, killing others, which God has forbidden unless it is just, usury, taking money from orphans, desertion, defaming innocent women believers," as well as the other grave sins such as drinking alcohol, adultery, disobeying parents, and committing peijury.⁸ In general, we must always be quick to obey God, and remember especially to repeat His name when joining battle. Abu al-Darda said: "Do a good deed before battle, for you fight with your deeds."⁹

Third, it has become clear to us during our defensive *jihad* against the American enemy and its enormous propaganda machine, that it depends for the most part on psychological warfare. It also depends on intense air strikes, which hide its most conspicuous weak points: fear, cowardice, and lack of fighting spirit among its troops. These troops are utterly convinced of their government's tyranny and lies, and they know the cause they are defending is not just. They merely fight for capitalists, takers of usury, and arms and oil merchants, including the criminal gang in the White House. Add to that Bush Senior's personal grudges and Crusader hatred. It has also become clear to us that one of the most effective and readily available means of neutralizing the Crusader enemy's air force is to dig large numbers of roofed and disguised trenches, something I pointed out in a previous statement last year during the battle of Tora Bora. In that great battle, the forces of faith triumphed over all the evil forces of materialism by remaining true to their principles. I will recount a part of it to you to prove both how cowardly they are and how effective trenches are at wearing the enemy down. Our number was something approaching three hundred *mujahidin*. We dug one hundred trenches, spread across an area no more than one square mile—one trench for every three brothers—so as to avoid heavy human casualties from the bombing. From the

6 Qur'an, 47:7.

7 From the *hadith* collection of al-Bukhari, vol. 4, book 51, no. 28.

8 Although these are all discouraged in Islam, they are not a part of the *hadith* record that outlines the most destructive sins.

9 Quoted in ibn Qutiba al-Dinuri, *Ayun al-Akhhbar*, p. 144. Abu Darda was one of the Prophet Muhammad's nominated transcribers of the Qur'an, who would record each passage of the Qur'an as it was revealed to him. 42 different transcribers were used.

first hour of the American campaign on 20th Rajab 1422 AH [October 7 2001], our positions came under intensive bombardment. This continued on and off until the middle of Ramadan, and on the morning of Ramadan 17th [December 3 2001] very heavy bombing began, especially after the American command had confirmed that some of the al-Qaeda command, such as the humble servant and the brother and *mujahid* Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri were still in Tora Bora. The bombing continued around the clock—not a second went by without warplanes flying over our heads, day and night. The American defense ministry command room, with all its allies, put everything they had into blowing up and destroying this small area. They tried to eradicate it altogether. The planes poured down their fire on us, especially after they had completed their standard missions in Afghanistan. The American forces barraged us with smart bombs, bombs weighing a thousand pounds, cluster bombs, and bunker busters. Bombers like the B-52 circled above us, one of them for more than two hours, dropping twenty to thirty bombs at a time. Modified C-130 planes attacked us all night with carpet bombs and other kinds of modern firepower. Despite the unprecedented scale of this bombardment and the terrible propaganda, all focusing on one small, besieged spot, as well as the hypocrites' forces, which they got to fight against us for over two weeks, non-stop, and whose daily attacks we resisted by the will of God Almighty, we pushed them back in defeat every time, carrying their dead and injured. Despite all this, the American forces dared not storm our positions. What clearer evidence could there be of their cowardice, of their fear and lies, of the myths about their alleged power? The battle culminated with the resounding, devastating failure of the global alliance of evil, with all its supposed power, to overcome a small group of *mujahidin*, numbering no more than three hundred, in their trenches within one square mile, at temperatures as low as ten degrees below zero. We suffered only about 6 per cent casualties in the battle, and we ask God to accept them as martyrs. As for those in the trenches, we lost only about 2 per cent, thank God. If all the forces of global evil could not even achieve their objective over one square mile against a small number of *mujahidin* with such modest capabilities, how could they expect to triumph over the entire Islamic world? This is impossible, with God's will, as long as people stay true to their religion and insist on waging *jihad* for it. So, brother *mujahidin* in Iraq, do not be frightened by the lies propagated by America about its power, and about its smart or laser-guided bombs. These

have no significant effect in hills, trenches, plains, or forests, as they require clear targets. Neither smart nor stupid bombs can penetrate well-disguised trenches in anything better than a random way that wastes the enemy's ammunition and resources. So use trenches as much as you can: as the Caliph Umar, may God be pleased with him, said: "Use the ground as a shield." In other words, take the earth as a shield, for with God's grace and will it ensures the total exhaustion of the enemy's bomb supply within a few months. Their daily production is small enough to be easily endured, with God's will. We also underline the importance of dragging the enemy forces into a protracted, exhausting, close combat, making the most of camouflaged defense positions in plains, farms, hills, and cities. What the enemy fears most is urban and street warfare, in which heavy and costly human losses can be expected. Further, we emphasize the importance of martyrdom operations, which have inflicted unprecedented harm on America and Israel, thanks to God Almighty.

We also decree that any of the hypocrites in Iraq, or Arab rulers who have helped America in their murder of Muslims in Iraq, anyone who approved of their actions and followed them into this Crusader war by fighting with them or providing bases or administrative support, or any other kind of backing, should be aware that they are apostates who are outside the community of Islam; it is therefore permitted to take their money and their blood. God Almighty said: "You who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them—God does not guide such wrongdoers."¹⁰ We also stress to true Muslims that, amid such momentous events and such a heated atmosphere, they must motivate and mobilize the *umma* to liberate themselves from their enslavement to these oppressive, tyrannical, apostate ruling regimes who are supported by America, and to establish God's rule on earth. The areas most in need of liberation are Jordan, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. It is also no secret that this Crusader war is directed primarily against the people of Islam, regardless of whether the socialist party, or Saddam, remains [in power] or not.¹¹ So, Muslims in general and in Iraq in

¹⁰ Qur'an, 5:51.

¹¹ By the socialist party, bin Laden means the Ba'ath ("resurrection") party. Ba'athist ideology combined Arab socialism, nationalism, and Pan-Arabism. Originally a pan-Arab organization, it split in 1966 into two branches, one based in Syria, the other in Iraq. In Iraq, the Ba'athists held power from 1963 until 2003; in Syria they are still in power.

particular must prepare themselves for *jihad* against this unjust campaign and make sure to acquire ammunition and weapons. This is their prescribed duty. God Almighty said: "[Let them be] on their guard and armed with their weapons: the disbelievers would dearly like you to be heedless of your weapons and baggage, so that they can take you in a single assault."¹² It is well known that fighting under pagan banners is not allowed, and that the Muslim's belief and banner must be clear when fighting for God. As the Prophet, said: "Only he whose aim in fighting is to keep God's word supreme fights in God's cause."¹³ There is no harm in such circumstances if the Muslims' interests coincide with those of the socialists in fighting the Crusaders, despite our firm conviction that they are infidels. The time of these socialist rulers is long past. The socialists are infidels, wherever they may be, whether in Baghdad or Aden.¹⁴ The current fighting and the fighting that will take place in the coming days can be very much compared to the Muslims' previous battles. There is nothing wrong with a convergence of interests here, just as the Muslims' struggle against Byzantium suited the Persians but did not harm the Prophet's companions, may God be pleased with them.

Before concluding, we should also emphasize the importance of good morale and of guarding against false rumours, defeatism, uncertainty, and discouragement. God's Prophet, said: "Bring good news and do not discourage others."¹⁵ He also said: "Abu Talha's voice in the army is better than a thousand men."¹⁶ At the battle of Yarmuk,¹⁷ a man said to Khaled ibn Walid: "How many the Byzantines are, and how few the Muslims." Khaled, may God be pleased with him, replied: "Nonsense. Armies do not triumph by having large

12 Qur'an, 4:102. Bin Laden does not quote the whole verse, so the context is lost. In its entirety, verse 102 describes a system for prayer in rotations so that part of the Muslims will remained armed at all times.

13 From the *hadith* collection of al-Bukhari, vol. 1, book 3, no. 125.

14 Before 1990, when North and South Yemen merged to become the Republic of Yemen, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, whose capital was Aden, was the only Communist state to exist in the Middle East.

15 Quoted in ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arah*, p. 5,079.

16 Quoted in ibn Manzur, *Makhtasar Tarikh Damashq*, p. 1,234.

17 The Battle of Yarmuk (Syria) was fought between the Muslim Arabs and Byzantines, four years after the death of the prophet Muhammad, in August 636. It marked the first great wave of Muslim conquests outside Arabia, and heralded the rapid advance of Islam into Christian Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia. The Muslim forces were led by the celebrated general Khalid ibn Walid (584—642); though outnumbered, the Muslim forces were victorious, and Damascus was captured within a month of the batde.

numbers. They are only conquered by their own defeatism," or something along those lines. May the words of God Almighty stay in your mind: "A prophet should not take prisoners until he has ensured his dominance in the land."¹⁸ And "When you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike them in the necks."¹⁹ Your reprimand to the Crusaders should be just as the poet said: "All there is between you and me is the piercing of kidneys and smiting of necks."²⁰

In conclusion, I enjoin us all to fear God both covertly and overtly, and to be patient in the *jihad*, for victory requires patience. I enjoin us all to pray and to repeat God's name. God Almighty said: "Believers, when you meet a force in battle, stand firm and keep God firmly in mind, so that you may prosper."²¹

Oh God, revealer of the book, director of the clouds, defeater of factions, defeat them and give us victory over them.

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"Our Lord, give us good in this world and in the Hereafter, and protect us from the torment of the Fire."²¹ May God's prayers and blessings be upon Muhammad and upon all his family and companions.

18 Qur'an, 8:67.

19 Qur'an, 47:4.

20 Qur'an, 8:45.

21 Qur'an, 2:201. This is noted in the following Qur'anic verse as being an effective prayer of righteous believers.