

NINETEEN STUDENTS

December 26 2001

By December 2001, when this statement was recorded for release to al-fazeera, to be shown on or near Christmas Day, bin Laden was a fugitive, hunted by American-led forces in an assault on the cave complex in the Tora Bora mountains, the former mujahidin base in eastern Afghanistan. The rapid US conquest of Afghanistan had put an end to the concentration of radical Islamic leadership, volunteers, and infrastructure in the country that had developed in the late 1990s. Physical assets were destroyed and personnel scattered; it was at this point that bin Laden seems to have told his associates to disperse, and money was given to anyone with a viable plan to launch attacks on Western interests.

While still denying that the US had any evidence against him to warrant the attack on Afghanistan, bin Laden now delivered his most extended and passionate celebration of the hijackers of 9/11. It was "not nineteen Arab states," but "nineteen post-secondary students who shook America's throne;" they had struck a mighty blow at the destructive and usurious global economy controlled by America, deployed along with military force to impose unbelief and humiliation on the poor. Their feat, says bin Laden, was a response to daily injustice and oppression, the killing of children in Palestine that is a modern version of the Pharaoh's killing of Jewish children in Egypt. He states that the attackers have shown the way to a struggle against America that is both financial and military, since it is just as important to strike at the US economy by all means available as it is to fight US troops and those allied with them. The coming fight, he warns, will be another, greater Vietnam for the USA. Its downfall will come, not through bin Laden's agencies, dead or alive, but through the spiritual awakening of the umma, manifest in the victorious jihad against the Soviet army, and now inspiring its sequel against America.

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 messenger.

Three months after the blessed strikes against global unbelief and its leader America, and approximately two months after the beginning of this vicious Crusader campaign against Islam, we should discuss the meaning of these events, which have revealed things of the greatest importance to Muslims. It has become all too clear that the West in general, with America at its head, carries an unspeakable Crusader hatred for Islam. Those who have endured the continuous bombing from American aeroplanes these last months know this only too well.

How many innocent villages have been destroyed, how many millions forced out into the freezing cold, these poor innocent men, women, and children who are now taking shelter in refugee camps in Pakistan while America launches a vicious campaign based on mere suspicion?¹

If America had evidence that could prove with a degree of certainty who did this deed [9/11], then it would attribute it to Europe, to the IRA, for example. There were many ways in which it could have dealt with the problem, but even though it was merely a matter of suspicion, the real, ugly face of Crusader hatred for the Islamic world immediately manifested itself in all its clarity.

At this point I would like to emphasize the fact that the struggle between us and America is of the utmost gravity and importance, not only to Muslims but to the entire world. On what basis does America accuse this group of emigrants² who wage *jihad* for God's sake, against whom there is no evidence other than that of injustice, oppression, and hostility?

1 According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), an estimated 200,000 Afghans fled their country in 2001, joining the 3.5 million already outside the country.

2 The emigration (*hijra*) of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 is a concept of profound significance in Islam. After the *hijra*, Muhammad prevailed, defeating the Meccans at the battle of Badr in 624, and winning over the people of Medina, returning home to Mecca in triumph in 630. Radical Islamists have consciously imitated the *hijra*, withdrawing to a society that allows them to live as "true" Muslims, and launching a campaign that they believe will, like Muhammad's, eventually be successful. Like Muhammad, they will endure periods of oppression and difficulty but, as they follow God's will, and the injunctions of Muhammad and the "righteous predecessors" (*salaj*), they will eventually prevail.

The history of the Arab *mujahidin* who waged *Jihad* for the grace of God Almighty is as clear as can be. In the face of the Soviet Union's despicable terrorism against children and innocents in Afghanistan twenty years ago, these Arab *mujahidin* rose up and left their jobs, universities, families, and tribes to earn the pleasure of God, to help God's religion and to help these poor Muslims.

It is inconceivable that those who came to help the poor people today came to kill innocents, as is being alleged. History recounts that America supported everyone who waged *Jihad* and fought against Russia,³ but when God blessed these Arab *mujahidin* with going to help those poor innocent women and children in Palestine, America became angry and turned its back, betraying all those who had fought in Afghanistan.

What is happening in Palestine today is extremely clear, and something about which all of humanity since Adam can agree. Some may get corrupted, and people differ on many issues, but there are some whom God Almighty keeps from corruption, in contrast to those whose souls have become deviant and have reached an excessive degree of oppression and hostility. But one issue on which people are agreed, even if they themselves have been the victims of oppression and hostility, is that you cannot kill innocent children.

The deliberate killing of innocent children in Palestine today is the ugliest, most oppressive, and hostile act, and something that threatens all of humanity.

History knows that one who kills children, even if rarely, is a follower of Pharaoh. God Almighty favoured the sons of Israel when He helped them escape from Pharaoh. "Remember when We saved you from Pharaoh's people, who subjected you to terrible torment, slaughtering your sons and sparing only your women."⁴ Slaughtering children was something for which the head of oppression, unbelief, and hostility, Pharaoh, was famous, yet the sons of Israel have done the same thing to our sons in Palestine. The whole world has witnessed Israeli soldiers killing Muhammad al-Durreh and many others like him.⁵

3 Bin Laden had previously denied the idea that America contributed significantly to the Afghan resistance against the USSR; see above, p. 86.

4 Qur'an, 2:49.

5 On September 30 2000, a French cameraman caught on film Israeli security forces shooting and killing 12-year-old Muhammad al-Durreh in Gaza. An Israeli inquiry into the incident found no fault with their security forces, despite the testimony of the cameraman and the video showing the event, for which see www.ramallahonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8.

People across the entire world, both in East and West, are contravening their faiths by denying these deeds, but America goes on supporting those oppressors and enemies of our sons in Palestine. God Almighty has decreed that if someone reaches such an excessive degree of hostility that he kills another unlawfully, this is the most abhorrent deed, but it is yet more abhorrent to kill innocent children. God Almighty says: "On account of [his deed], We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person—unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land—it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind."⁶

So in fact it is as if Israel—and those backing it in America—have killed all the children in the world. What will stop Israel killing our sons tomorrow in Tabuk, al-Jauf and other areas?⁷ What would the rulers do if Israel broadened its territory according to what they allege is written in their false, oppressive, unjust books, which said that "Our borders extend as far as Medina"⁸ What will rulers do except submit to this American Zionist lobby?

Rational people must wake up, or what befell Muhammad al-Durreh and his brothers will happen tomorrow to their sons and women. There is no strength or power save in God.

The matter is extremely serious. This disgraceful terrorism is practised by America in its most abhorrent form in Palestine and in Iraq. This terrible man, Bush Sr, was the reason for the murder of over a million children in Iraq, besides all the other men and women [who have been killed].

The events of 22nd Jumada al-Thani, or Aylul [September 11] are merely a response to the continuous injustice inflicted upon our sons in Palestine, Iraq,

6 Qur'an, 5:32. This is in the Qur'anic story of Cain and Abel, with reference to Cain's deed. The verse concludes, "Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land."

7 Tabuk and al-Jauf are the names of cities in northwest Saudi Arabia and the provinces that surround them, bordering Jordan and the Gulf of Aqaba. Tabuk is also home to a major Saudi air force base; a large US-operated joint-training base is located just outside the town.

8 The Torah defines the borders of the Promised Land as follows: "In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.'" (Genesis 15:18-21). Current maps of the projected "Eretz Israel", the land that made up the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, show its borders extending into present-day Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, north of Medina. See for example <http://www.ahavat-israel.com/eretz/future.php>; <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/israel/greater-israel-maps.htm>

Somalia, southern Sudan, and other places, like Kashmir. The matter concerns the entire *umma*. People need to wake up from their sleep and try to find a solution to this catastrophe that is threatening all of humanity.

Those who condemn these operations [9/11] have viewed the event in isolation and have failed to connect it to previous events or to the reasons behind it. Their view is blinkered and lacks either a legitimate or a rational basis. They merely saw others in America and the media decrying these operations, so they did the same themselves.

These people remind me of the wolf who, seeing a lamb, said to it: "You were the one who polluted my water last year." The lamb replied: "It wasn't me," but the wolf insisted: "Yes it was." The lamb said: "I was only born this year." The wolf replied: "Then it was your mother who polluted my water", and he ate the lamb. When the poor ewe saw her son being torn by the wolf's teeth, her maternal feelings drove her to give the wolf a hard butt. The wolf cried out: "Look at this terrorism!" And all the parrots repeated what he said, saying "Yes, we condemn the ewe's butting of the wolf." What do you think about the wolf eating the ewe's lamb?

These blessed, successful strikes are merely a reaction to events in our land in Palestine, in Iraq, and in other places. America has continued this policy with the coming of George Bush Jr, who began his term with violent airstrikes on Iraq to emphasize the policy of oppression and hostility, and to show that the blood of Muslims has no value.⁹

This blessed reaction came by the grace of God Almighty, showing very clearly that this haughty, domineering power, America, the Hubal of the age, is based on great economic power, but it is soft.¹⁰ How quickly it fell from the sky, by the grace of God Almighty.

It was not nineteen Arab states that did this deed [9/11]. It was not Arab armies or ministries who humbled the oppressor who harms us in Palestine and elsewhere. It was nineteen post-secondary students—I beg God Almighty to accept them—who shook America's throne, struck its economy right in the heart, and dealt the biggest military power a mighty blow, by the grace of God Almighty.

9 The February 26 2001 bombings included a large sortie of US and UK planes attacking sites near Baghdad; the raids were almost universally condemned.

10 Hubal is the name of a pagan idol whose followers were defeated by early Muslim forces. Bin Laden also uses this name for America in Statement 10 (see above, p. 105).

Here we have clear proof that this destructive, usurious global economy that America uses, together with its military force, to impose unbelief and humiliation on poor peoples, can easily collapse. Those blessed strikes in New York and the other places forced it to acknowledge the loss of more than a trillion dollars, by the grace of God Almighty. And they used simple means—the enemy's aeroplanes and schools—without even the need for training camps. God gave them the chance to teach a harsh lesson to these arrogant people who think that freedom only has meaning for the white race, and that other peoples should be humiliated and subservient, not even rising up when they strike us, as they did previously in Iraq.

I say that American military power, as demonstrated recently in Afghanistan, where it poured down all its anger on these poor people, has taught us great and important lessons in how to resist this arrogant force, by the grace of God Almighty.

By way of example, if the front line with the enemy is 100km long, this line should also be deep. In other words, it is not enough for us to have a defense line 100, 200, or 300 metres deep. It should be a few kilometres deep, with trenches dug all the way along and through it, so that the intensity of the American bombing is exhausted before it destroys these lines, and so that light, quick forces can move from one line to another and from one defense position to another.

We made use of this tactic after the intense American bombardment on the northern and Kabul lines,¹¹ and in this way the years pass and, with the will of God Almighty, America will not break the *mujahidin* lines.

Furthermore, it is well known that there are two elements to fighting; there is the fighting itself and then there is the financial element, such as buying weapons. This is emphasized in many verses of the Qur'an, such as the following: "God has purchased the persons and possessions of the believers in return for the Garden."¹²

II On October 7 2001, American and British forces began an aerial bombing campaign, targeting Taliban forces and al-Qaeda. Two weeks into the campaign, the Taliban line facing the Northern Alliance held; at this stage, the US began using cluster bombs and 15,000-pound daisy cutters. By November 2, Taliban lines were decimated; Kabul fell on November 13.

12 Qur'an, 9:111. The verse goes on: "... they fight in God's way: they kill and are killed—this is a true promise given by Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an. Who could be more faithful to his promise than God? So be happy with the bargain you have made: that is the supreme triumph."

So the struggle is both financial and physical. Even if the distance between us and the American military base is very great, and our weapons do not match up to their planes, we are able to soak up the pressure of these strikes with our broad defense lines. And in another way it is possible to strike the economic base that is the foundation of the military base, so when their economy is depleted they will be too busy with each other to be able to enslave poor peoples.

So I say that it is very important to focus on attacking the American economy by any means available. Here we have seen the real crime of those who claim to call for humanity and freedom. Just a tiny quantity [of explosives]—7 grams' worth—is more than enough to account for anyone. But America, in her hatred for the Taliban and for Muslims, drops bombs weighing 7 tons on our brothers in the front lines. That is equivalent to seven thousand kilograms, or seven million grams, even though 7 grams is more than enough for one person.

When the young men—we beg God to accept them—exploded less than two tons [of explosive] in Nairobi, America said that this was a terrorist strike, and that this is a weapon of mass destruction. But they have no qualms about using two bombs weighing seven million grams each.

After the Americans bombed entire villages¹³ for no reason other than to terrify people and make them afraid of hosting Arabs or going near them, their minister of defense got up and said that that was their right, meaning effectively that they had the right to annihilate people so long as they were Muslim and not American. This is the clearest and most blatant crime. Everyone who hears them saying that they did such things "by mistake" knows that this is the clearest and most brazen lie.

Some days ago, the Americans announced that they had hit al-Qaeda positions in Khost and had dropped a bomb on a mosque, which they said was a mistake. After investigations it became clear that scientists in Khost were saying their Ramadan evening prayers and had a meeting afterwards with the hero *mujahid* sheikh Jalal al-Din Haqqani, one of the foremost leaders of the *jihad* against the Soviets, who has resisted this American occupation of Afghan land. So they bombed the mosque and the Muslims while they were at

13 By mid-December 2001, US bombs had killed an estimated 3,767 civilians. See Seumas Milne, "The innocent dead in a coward's war," *Guardian*, December 20 2001, and more generally, Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (Verso, 2003), p. 30. Mann notes that during the US bombing of Afghanistan, "Overall civilian losses must have been close to 10,000—triple the deaths inflicted by 9/11." (*Ibid.*)

prayers, killing 105 of them. God save Sheikh Jalal, we hope that He blesses his life.¹⁴

This is Crusader hatred. So those who speak out and say that they condemn terrorism, but do not pay attention to the consequences, should take note. Our terrorism against America is a praiseworthy terrorism in defense against the oppressor, in order that America will stop supporting Israel, who kills our sons. Can you not understand this? It is very clear.

America and the western leaders always say that Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, and other such militias, are terrorist organizations. If self-defense is terrorism, what is legitimate? Our defense and our fight is no different to that of our brothers in Palestine like Hamas. We fight for "There is no God but God." The word of God is the highest and that of God's enemies is the lowest. So let us relieve the oppression of the poor people in Palestine and elsewhere.

Every possible analysis clearly shows all sensible Muslims should stand in the trenches,¹⁵ because this is the most dangerous, aggressive, violent, and fierce Crusader war against Islam. With God's will, America's end will not be far off. This will be nothing to do with the poor slave bin Laden, whether dead or alive. With God's grace, the awakening has begun, which is one of the benefits of these operations. I hope that God Almighty will take those young men to martyrdom and bring them together with the Prophet, the martyrs, and the righteous.

14 On November 16-17, US planes bombed a mosque and the attached religious seminary on the outskirts of Khost, as part of a campaign targeted at Jalaluddin Haqqani, seen as a key link between the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Local officials were quoted as saying that a total of 62 people were killed in the mosque, and 34 in the religious school. The Deobandi cleric Maulvi Jalaluddin Haqqani rose to prominence in the 1980s as a military leader of the radical Islamic group Hezb-i-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. He enjoyed close ties with the Pakistani military and the Gulf States. He joined the Taliban in 1996, and two years later was appointed Minister of Tribal and Border affairs. Bin Laden contacted Haqqani before his departure to Afghanistan in May 1996, and was his guest there.

15 The word "trench," employed by bin Laden throughout his statements, has particular significance in Islam. The Qur'an (85:4) reads "Damned were the makers of the Trench", referring to a fiery trench into which Muslims, refusing to renounce Islam, were cast for their faith. It also alludes to the Battle of the Trench in 627, one of Muhammad's early victories against considerable odds. A Meccan army of 10,000, comprising Muslims and Jews, mounted a campaign against the Muslims in Medina, defended by Muhammad and 3,000 followers. All the defenders joined to dig a trench north of Medina to protect the city; when the Meccan cavalry arrived, they tried for three days to cross the trench, but were unsuccessful; on the third day, a strong hurricane forced them to retreat, and admit defeat.

Those young men did a very great deed, a glorious deed. God rewarded them and we pray that their parents will be proud of them, because they raised Muslims' heads high and taught America a lesson it won't forget, with God's will.

As I warned previously in an interview on the ABC channel, by involving itself in a struggle with the sons of Saudi Arabia, America will forget the Vietnam crisis, with the grace of God Almighty. What is yet to come will be even greater.

From Saudi Arabia fifteen young men set out—we pray to God to accept them as martyrs. They set out from the land of faith, where lies the Muslims' greatest treasure, where faith returns, as our Prophet rightly said, to Medina, just as the snake returns to its hole. Another two came from the Eastern Peninsula, from the Emirates, another from the Levant, Ziad al-Jarrah, and another from the land of Egypt, Mohammed Atta, may God accept all of them as martyrs.

With their actions they provided a very great sign, showing that it was this faith in their hearts that urged them to do these things, to give their soul to "There is no god but God". By these deeds they opened a great door for good and truth. Those we hear in the media saying that martyrdom operations should not be carried out are merely repeating the desires of the tyrants, America and its collaborators.

Every day, from east to west, our *umma* of 1200 million Muslims is being slaughtered, in Palestine, in Iraq, Somalia, Western Sudan, Kashmir, the Philippines, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Assam. We do not hear their voices, yet as soon as the victim rises up and offers himself on behalf of his religion, people are outraged. 1200 million Muslims are being slaughtered without anyone even knowing, but if anyone comes to their defense, those people just repeat whatever the tyrants want them to say. They have neither common sense nor authority.

There is a clear moral in the story of the boy, the king, the magician, and the monk, of people offering themselves for "There is no god but God". There is also another meaning, which is that victory is not only a question of winning, which is how most people see it, but of sticking to your principles.

God mentioned the people of the trench and immortalized their memory by praising them for being resolute in their faith. They were given a choice between faith and being thrown into the fire. They refused not to believe in God, and so they were thrown into hell. At the end of the story of the boy,

when the tyrant king ordered that the believers should be thrown in the pit, a poor mother came carrying her son. When she saw the fire she was afraid that harm would befall her son, so she went back. But as the Prophet relates, her son told her: "be patient, mother, for you are in the right."

No Muslim would ever possibly ask: what did they benefit? The fact is that they were killed—but this is total ignorance. They were victorious, with the blessings of God Almighty, and with the immortal heavens that God promised them. Victory is not material gain; it is about sticking to your principles.

And in the sayings of our Prophet, there is the story about the uneducated boy, the magician and the monk.¹⁶ One day, an animal was blocking the road, and the boy said, "Today, I'll find out who is better, the monk or the magician." Because he was lacking in knowledge, he did not as yet understand which one was better, so he asked God to show him. If the monk was more beloved to God Almighty, then he would be able to kill the animal. So the boy picked up the rock and threw it at the animal, and it dropped dead. The monk turned to him and said: "My son, today you are better than me,"¹⁷ even though he was far more knowledgeable than this ignorant young boy. Nevertheless, God Almighty lit up this boy's heart with the light of faith, and he began to make sacrifices for the sake of "There is no god but God".

This is a unique and valuable story which the youth of Islam are waiting for their scholars to tell them, which would show the youth that these [the 9/11 attackers] are the people who have given up everything for the sake of "There is no god but God", and would tell them what the scholar told the boy: "Today, you are better than us."

This is the truth. The measure of virtue in this religion is, as the saying of our Prophet goes, the measure of faith—not only collecting knowledge but

16 This refers to a parable told by the Prophet, recorded in the *hadith* collection of Muslim, book 42, no. 7,148. In the parable, a boy is chosen by the king to receive training to be the new court magician, but the boy is captivated by a monk who is devoted to Islam. At one point a wild animal blocks the road, and the boy invokes God, saying that if the monk's business is more important then he should be able to kill the wild animal by throwing a stone at it, and if the magician's business is more important, the stone should not kill the beast. The animal dies at his throw, and the boy becomes utterly devoted to God. This irks the king, who then executes the monk and attempts several times to execute the boy, but the boy survives because of his continual affirmation of Islam. When he finally assents to die in the name of Islam, the members of the public who converted because of his testimony are threatened with being thrown into a trench of fire unless they repent. None of them do.

17 Quoted from the *hadith* collection of Muslim, book 42, no. 7,148 (see above, n. 25).

using it. According to this yardstick, whoever fights them [the unbelievers] physically is a believer, whoever fights them verbally is a believer, and whoever fights them with his heart is a believer. Nothing can be more essentially faithful than this. These people fought the great unbelief with their hands and their souls, and we pray to God to accept them as martyrs.

The lord of martyrs Hamza bin Abd al-Muttalib, said that God illuminated a unknown man's heart with faith, and he stood up against an unjust imam, who rebuked him and killed him, as is written in the *al-Jami al-Sahih*.^{1*}

He won a great victory that not one of the noble followers or companions could achieve. God Almighty raised him up to the status of lord of the martyrs. This is something that our Prophet emphasized. So how could any sane Muslim say, "What did he benefit from it?" This is clear error and we ask God for good health.

God opened the way for these young men to tell America, the head of global unbelief, and its allies, that they are living in falsehood. They sacrificed themselves for "There is no god but God."

We have spoken much about these great events, but I will sum things up by emphasizing the importance of continuing *jihadi* action against America, both militarily and economically. America has been set back, with the help of God Almighty, and the economic bleeding still goes on today. Yet still we need more strikes. The youth should strive to find the weak points of the American economy and strike the enemy there.

Before I finish, I should mention these heroes, these true men, these great giants who erased the shame from the forehead of our *umma*. I should like to recite some poetry in praise of them and all those who follow the same path as Muhammad.

But before that, I would like to stress one point, which is that these battles going on round the clock today in Afghanistan against the Arab *mujahidin*, and particularly the Taliban, have clearly shown just how powerless the American government and its soldiers really are. Despite the great develop-

18 Hamza ibn al-Muttalib, was the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. He converted to Islam in the sixth year of Muhammad's prophecy, and was the first military commander of Islam. The *al-Jami al-Sahili*, a collection of 7,275 tested prophetic traditions, was written by the Persian Muhammad al-Bukhari (810-70), who travelled all over the Islamic world in order to compile the book, learning over 600,000 traditions, true and false.

ments in military technology, they can't do anything without relying on apostates and hypocrites.¹⁹ So what is the difference today between Babrak Karmal,²⁰ who brought in the Russians to occupy his country, and the deposed president Burhan al-Din (and *din* has nothing to do with him)?²¹ What difference is there between the two? One brought Russians to occupy the land of Islam and the other brought Americans. As I said, this clearly shows the weakness of the American soldier, by the grace of God Almighty. So you should seize this chance, and the youth should continue the *jihad* and work against the Americans. I'll finish with some lines of poetry in memory of those heroes from the land of Hijaz, the land of faith, from Ghamid and Zahran, from Bani Shahr, from Harb, from Najd,²² and we pray to God to accept them all, and in memory of those who came from Holy Mecca, Salem and Nawaf al-Hazmi, Khaled al-Mihdhar, or those who came from Medina, the radiant, who left life and its comforts for the sake of "There is no god but God".²³

I testify that these men, as sharp as a sword,
 Have persevered through all trials.
 How special they are who sold their souls to God,
 Who smiled at Death when his sword gazed ominously at them,
 Who willingly bared their chests as shields.
 Though the clothes of darkness enveloped us and the poisoned tooth bit us,
 Though our homes overflowed with blood and the assailant desecrated our land,

19 Bin Laden is referring to the government of Pakistan, which was cooperating fully with the American invasion of Afghanistan.

20 Babrak Karmal was the USSR-backed Communist president of Afghanistan from December 1979 until 1986, when he resigned as a scapegoat for Soviet reverses during the war.

21 In 1992, following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Burhanuddin Rabbani was appointed President of the Islamic Council of Afghanistan until Kabul fell to the Taliban in 1996. He became head of the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, and was still recognized by the West as Afghanistan's head of state until formally handing over to Hamid Karzai on December 22 2001. Bin Laden makes a play on words in Arabic. The element "al-Din" is a common feature in Arabic names, *din* meaning religious. Bin Laden's pun is ironic; for him, Rabbani is not remotely religious.

22 These are various tribes and locations from the Arabian peninsula.

23 Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khaled al-Mihdhar were the two Meccans suspected of being the chief organizers of 9/11, along with the pilots; Nawaf's brother Salem was also one of the hijackers.

Though from the squares the shining of swords and horses vanished,
And sound of drums was growing
The fighters' winds blew, striking their towers and telling them:
We will not cease our raids until you leave our fields."⁴

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

²⁴ The author of the poem recited by bin Laden is Yusuf Abu Hilala, a professor of Islamic law at a Jordanian University, and longstanding member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Abu Hilala was a close friend of bin Laden's mentor Abdallah Azzam, and apparently dedicated a poem to bin Laden entitled "The Fighting Eagle". Bin Laden made two small but significant changes to the last lines of the poem, which originally read: "The fighters' winds blew, striking their castles, and telling the assailants: / Our swords will not be thrown down until you leave our fields." Bin Laden altered "castles" to "towers", and replaced "swords will not be thrown down", with "raids will not cease".