

EDITED BIN LADEN CNN INTERVIEW 5.11.97

Peter Arnett, CNN Correspondent (voice-over): Amidst these remote mountains of Afghanistan are the various hiding places of one of the world's most wanted men, Usama Bin Ladin.

Usama Bin Laden: We declared a jihad, a holy war, against the United States government because it is unjust, criminal, and tyrannical.

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Arnett (voice-over): Our quest to meet Bin Ladin begins in Peshawar, Pakistan, and then across the Khyber pass to Jalabad, Afghanistan, where we wait for several days. Finally, Bin Ladin's media adviser arrives. We are allowed to take our lights and sound equipment, but not our camera.

There have been assassination attempts against Bin Ladin, and his security force worries our camera might contain a tracking device that would give away his location. The interview will be conducted with their camera. As best as we can reconstruct it, this is the route that we took to meet Bin Ladin. We are put in a mini-van with curtained windows and drive west.

As night falls, we move to a four wheel drive vehicle that makes its way up a rough mountain path, past checkpoints manned by heavily-armed men. We are searched and electronically scanned to ensure that we are not carrying a tracking device. About 5,000 feet up is small hut. We are allowed about an hour-and-a-half with Bin Ladin. We have submitted questions in advance. He agrees to answer most of them, but does not allow follow-up questions.

Mr. Bin Ladin, you have declared a jihad against the United States. Can you tell us why?

Bin Ladin: The U.S. government has committed acts that are extremely unjust, hideous and criminal, through its support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and we believe the U.S. is directly responsible for those killed in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. Due to its subordination to the Jews, the arrogance of the United States regime has reached the point that they occupied Arabia, the holiest place of the Muslims, who are more than a billion people in the world today. For this, and other acts of aggression and injustice, we have declared jihad against the U.S.

Arnett: Is the jihad directed against the U.S. government, or United States troops in Arabia? What about U.S. civilians in Arabia or the people of the United States?

Bin Ladin: We have focused declaration of jihad on striking at the U.S. soldiers inside Arabia, the country of the two holy places, Mecca and Medina. In our religion, it is not permissible for any non-Muslim to stay in Arabia. Therefore, even though

American civilians are not targeted in our plan, they must leave. We do not guarantee their safety.

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<<Arnett >>: The Afghan war changed <<Bin>> Ladin. He saw a lightly armed guerrilla force defeat a superpower.

Bin Ladin: In this jihad, the biggest benefit was the myth of the superpower was destroyed, not only in my mind, but also in the minds of all Muslims.

Arnett: The Afghan war radicalized those who fought there.

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Bin Ladin: By being loyal to the U.S. regime, the Saudi regime has committed an act against Islam. When this main foundation was violated, other corrupt acts followed in every aspect of the country: Economic, social and government services.

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Arnett (voice-over): 1992, some 30,000 U.S. troops are dispatched on a humanitarian mission to Somalia, a Muslim nation embroiled in famine and civil war. U.S. soldiers are caught in the cross-fire. Nineteen are killed. In his first admission to a U.S. news organization, Bin Ladin says Arabs who fought in Afghanistan, men who looked to him as a leader, killed those U.S. troops.

Bin Ladin: Resistance started against the American invasion, because Muslims did not believe the U.S. allegations that they came to save Somalis. With Allah's grace, Muslims in Somalia cooperated with some Arab holy warriors who were in Afghanistan. Together, they killed large numbers of American occupation troops.

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Arnett: ...Then, there is the possibility of a Bin Ladin connection of the two bombings in Saudi Arabia: At Riyadh in 1995 and Dhahran in 1996, that left a total of 24 U.S. troops dead.

Bin Ladin: It's no secret that during the two explosions, I was not in Saudi Arabia, but I have great respect for the people who did this. They are heroes. What they did is a big honor that I missed participating in.

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<< Arnett >> : The U.S. government charges << Bin >> Ladin with supporting terrorist activities throughout the Middle East.

Bin Ladin: The U.S. today has set a double standard, calling whoever goes against its injustice, a terrorist. It wants to occupy our countries, steal our resources, impose agents on us to rule us, and then wants us to agree to all this. If we refuse to do so, it says we are terrorists. When Palestinian children throw stones against the Israeli occupation, the U.S. says that they are terrorists. Whereas, when Israel bombed the United Nations building in Lebanon while it was full of children and women, the U.S. stopped any plan to condemn Israel.

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Arnett: Did Ramzi Yousef stay in your house in Peshawar?

Bin Ladin: I don't know Ramzi Yousef. What the American government and Pakistani intelligence has been reporting isn't true at all.

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Arnett: What are your views about Sheik Omar Abdel Rahmen, and have you ever met him? Do you know him?

Bin Ladin: Sheik Omar Abdel Rahmen 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.

<< Arnett >>: Mr. << Bin >> Ladin, were you involved in the financing of the World Trade Center in New Your City?

Bin Ladin: I have no connection or relation with this explosion.

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<< Arnett >>: ... 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 provokes disgust and revulsion. The president has a heart that knows no words. A heart that kills hundreds of children, definitely knows no words. Our people in Arabia will send him messages without words, because he does not understand words. If there is a message that I may send through you, I address the mothers of the American troops. To these mothers I say, if they are concerned for their sons then let them object to the U.S. government's policy.

[End of Transcript]