

Bruce Lawrence discusses the life and the messages of Osama bin Laden.

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The Speaker

Bruce Lawrence is Professor of Religion and Director of the Islamic Study Center at Duke University, and editor of *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*.

Review Questions

CHAPTER 1: *Lawrence discusses Osama bin Laden's early life and influences.*

1. How did bin Laden envision Saudi Arabia's role in the Muslim world?
2. What were the main influences on bin Laden's study of Islam, according to Lawrence?

CHAPTER 2: *Lawrence describes bin Laden's entry onto the global stage via the Soviet Afghan War, and his return to Saudi Arabia.*

1. How did the Soviet Afghan War shape both bin Laden's goals and public image?
2. What did bin Laden propose to the Saudi government regarding the defense of Kuwait after it was invaded by Iraq? What was the Saudi government's response?

CHAPTER 3: *Lawrence talks about bin Laden's eviction from Saudi Arabia and Sudan, and his eventual return to Afghanistan.*

1. How did the United States-led defense of Kuwait represent a turning point in bin Laden's life?
2. Why was bin Laden able to settle safely in Sudan after leaving Saudi Arabia?
3. What led to Sudan's decision to evict bin Laden?

CHAPTER 4: *Lawrence describes the circumstances surrounding al Qaeda's formation and bin Laden's first public statement in 1996.*

1. Describe how bin Laden was received in Afghanistan, and the political atmosphere of the country at the time.
2. How did bin Laden's first statement constitute a declaration of war against the United States?

CHAPTER 5: *Lawrence discusses bin Laden's rhetoric and his claim to represent all Muslims.*

1. What are the main points of bin Laden's early statements, as Lawrence describes them?
2. How does bin Laden justify his call to action to the Muslim world?

CHAPTER 6: *Lawrence discusses bin Laden's methods of asserting religious authority.*

1. How does bin Laden position himself as the representative of all Muslims?
2. How was the use of media essential in bin Laden's rising influence among different Muslim groups?

Key Figures and Vocabulary

Abdullah Azzam

Islamic scholar, supporter of the *mujahideen*, and mentor to Osama bin Laden during the Soviet Afghan War.

Abul Ala Maududi

20th century Pakistani Islamist thinker whose teachings influenced both Azzam and bin Laden.

Al Jazeera

Arabic television network founded in Qatar in 1996. Al Jazeera provided live coverage of the American invasion of Afghanistan and broadcast many of bin Laden's statements.

Ayman al-Zawahiri

Al Qaeda's number two man and former leader of al Jihad, also known as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

Fatwa

A legal opinion or judgment issued by a Muslim cleric or legal scholar.

Hassan al-Turabi

An Islamic political leader in Sudan during the 1990's, al-Turabi promoted an Islamic state and criticized Western secularism.

Invasion of Kuwait (1990)

Conflict between the Republic of Iraq and Kuwait in which Kuwait was claimed as the 19th province of Iraq. Forces led by the United States later intervened, and Kuwait was liberated in 1991.

Jahili

An Islamic term for one who lives in a state of paganism similar to that which preceded the revelation of Islam.

Webcast: Exploring 9/11 – The World Before and After Supplementary Materials

CHAPTER 7: *Lawrence describes the role of media in both propagating and amplifying al Qaeda's jihadist message.*

1. How does bin Laden become “the first global *jihadist*,” as Lawrence calls him?
2. What does Lawrence mean when he says “the message is only as good as the medium,” and how did bin Laden's actions demonstrate an understanding of this concept?

CHAPTER 8: *Lawrence talks about bin Laden's interview with Tayseer Allouni, and shares his own speculations about bin Laden's current circumstances.*

1. Why was bin Laden's interview with Tayseer Allouni unique?
2. How does bin Laden defend his actions against Allouni's questioning?
3. What are Lawrence's reasons for believing that bin Laden is dead?

Questions for Further Discussion

1. How was Osama bin Laden influenced by his father's success and popularity?
2. Bin Laden's message is described as a “message of defense.” Why do you think he chose this approach?
3. Bin Laden used the media to target a specific audience. Did this audience already exist, or did bin Laden “create” it through his use of media? How effective do you consider media as a tool for amassing power?
4. Lawrence says that “terror isn't violence; terror is violence broadcast.” What does he mean by this, and what are the implications for a world in which communications technology is ever-advancing and increasingly immediate?
5. Why is the question of whether bin Laden is alive or deceased relevant to current events, and what would be the implications of proof one way or the other?

Recommended Resources

Lawrence, Bruce, ed. *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden.* (Verso, 2005)

Key Figures and Vocabulary (con't)

Jihad

Term used most frequently today to describe warfare undertaken on behalf of Islam. In its classical understanding, the concept of *jihad* means to struggle or to strive to become a better Muslim, as well as to engage in combat in defense of Muslims or their lands.

Mohammad Qutb

Mentor to bin Laden, and older brother of Sayyid Qutb, who supported violent *jihad*.

Mujahideen

Refers to one who is fighting for freedom; the literal Arabic translation is “struggler.” The term now often refers to armed militant Islamists.

Osama bin Laden

Founder and leader of al Qaeda, bin Laden was born in Yemen and raised in Saudi Arabia. His father was a successful business man and friend of the Saudi royal family.

Soviet Afghan War (1979 – 1989)

War between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the *mujahideen* - sparked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The *mujahideen* were aided by many countries (among them, the United States). Soviet forces withdrew in 1989.

Taliban

Militant Islamist movement which took power in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Soviet Afghan war, ruling from 1996 until 2001. The Taliban has since staged a resurgence in Afghanistan, and continues to fight for power.

Tayseer Allouni

Syrian journalist and former correspondent for Al Jazeera in Afghanistan. Allouni interviewed bin Laden soon after 9/11.

Ummah

Arabic term for “community” or “nation.” *Ummah* can also refer to the concept of a pan-Arabic Muslim world.