

I

This paper will examine the idea of evolving interpretations of a recent international figure, Osama bin Laden. The ways that he has been interpreted will be examined in significant detail. Additionally, Osama bin Laden will be compared to two other historical figures that share significant similarities, Saladin, the Muslim leader during the third crusade, and Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran after the revolution of 1979. Individual perspective causes all people to arrive at different conclusions given the same events. The analysis will endeavor to demonstrate how Osama bin Laden has been interpreted differently with the passage of time. There are two distinctly different views of Osama bin Laden in the world today, one of a self interested terrorist, and another of an Islamist leader. Finally, a conclusion will be offered as to who Osama bin Laden really is, whether a self interested terrorist or a genuine leader in the Muslim world, or something in between.

II

In order to understand who Osama bin Laden is it is necessary to know something of his background. This section will deal with of Osama bin Laden's early years and how that led to later events in his life. Osama bin Laden's father started from humble roots, having been a laborer in Yemen. His father, Mohammad bin Laden, had the foresight to

work hard enough to begin his own construction company by savings money. He saved his money and moved to Saudi Arabia to begin his new company. The move to Saudi Arabia was fortuitous. Upon arrival in Saudi Arabia he befriended members of the al Saud family that took power shortly later. This benefited his father tremendously. His fledgling construction company was awarded the very important and very lucrative contracts to reconstruct much of the holy city of Mecca. The greater result of this was that Osama bin Laden enjoyed a childhood of relative comfort and privilege.

The social influence of his family played a strong role in Osama bin Laden's development as well. One of the results of the family's social status was that when prestigious pilgrims made the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca they often stayed at the bin Laden family residence. As a result Osama bin Laden met many high government officials as well as clerics. He was afforded a unique opportunity to develop his understanding of Islam. According to Sheik Ahmed, one of Osama bin Laden's brothers, Osama bin Laden distinguished himself with his dedicated study of Islam rather than more childish activities.¹ In addition to the individual status of Osama bin Laden's family, there were also significant outside factors as well. It is very significant that Osama bin Laden was born in 1957 and grew up during very tumultuous times in a volatile region of the world.² This was the result of almost constant fighting between Israel and the neighboring Arab states.

In 1974 at age 17 he agreed to study management and economics. However he refused to study anywhere but an Islamic university. The result was that he began attending King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This is significant

¹ David Ensor, "Half-Brother Says bin Laden Is Alive and Well," CNN, March 19, 2002.

² Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York: Random House, 2001), 2.

because it represented a compromise, he was studying subjects his family believed important for his eventual role in the family business and at the same time this allowed him to remain in Saudi Arabia during turbulent times. The choice of university was also very important. Jeddah had become a haven for angry dissidents who were not being tolerated in their home countries, but were accepted in Saudi Arabia. Angry Arabs flocked to Jeddah to have their voices heard. These dissidents preached a return to the conservative values of Islam in order to protect the Muslim world from the dangers of the West.³ The social trends of the 1970's tended largely toward inclusion, this was seen as contrary to Islamic values.

Many of these dissidents were members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Among them was the man who would later become a type of mentor for Osama bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam. The Brotherhood had been formed in 1944 by making public their statement of goals. The main principles of the brotherhood call for loyalty to the *caliph*, or state. Their ideas classified people into four groups: believers, undecided, utilitarians, and opponents.⁴ The Brotherhood also believed that *jihad*, or holy war is a process as opposed to a one time event. These guidelines were a readily available reference for those who were still learning and had not yet developed strong opinions of their own.. Many of the beliefs that Osama bin Laden would later take on as his own are deeply rooted in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is also believed that it was during this time that Osama bin Laden developed his belief regarding the acceptability of killing civilians.⁵ The Koran, the Islamic Holy Book, is widely interpreted as expressly stating that civilians are to be respected as neutrals. Osama bin Laden holds a different interpretation,

³ Jason Burke, "The Making of Osama bin Laden," *Salon* (November 1, 2001), 4.

⁴ Christina Phelps Harris, *Nationalism and Revolution in Egypt* (California: Hoover Institution, 1964), 174.

⁵ Bill Loehfelm, *Osama bin Laden*, (New York: Lucent Books, 2003), 29.

he has declared that if civilians are participating in any way with actions against Muslims they are legitimate targets, to include being citizens of oppressing countries. Osama bin Laden wholeheartedly accepted the ideas of the dissidents, and especially Azzam's as his own.

III

The year 1979 proved to be a turning point in the Islamic world. It was during 1979 that the regime of the Shah in Iran fell before a popular revolution. It was also during 1979 that the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. One of the main principles of Islam states that Muslims will cooperate for the defense of the *umma*, or state. The Soviet Union had no official religion, and realistically did not want one. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a Muslim state was seen as an attack on the *umma*, and was thus a rallying cry for the Islamic world. Young Arabs eager to prove themselves flocked to Afghanistan for the chance to fight the Soviets. Osama bin Laden was among them.

In Afghanistan a new Osama bin Laden emerges. He is no longer the just another one of the bin Laden family children who would eventually join the family business. He was doing something special. He was participating in *jihad*. Osama bin Laden has shared his own beliefs about his time in Afghanistan by stating "What I lived in two years there, I could not have lived in a hundred years elsewhere".⁶ Osama bin Laden fundamentally changes from the person that everyone had expected him to become into something new, something special, something that distinguished him from the rest of the family. Osama bin Laden did not make radical changes the moment that he left Saudi Arabia. The first step was leaving, and the next step was organizing.

⁶ Osama bin Laden, quoted in Jonathan Randal, *Osama The Making of a Terrorist* (New York: Random House, 2004), 98.

The close relationship of the bin Laden family and the Saudi Royal family made Osama bin Laden the unofficial representative of the Saudi government in Peshawar, Pakistan, the jumping off point for Afghanistan. He managed a network that transported militants to Pakistan from all over the Middle East. He brought construction equipment from the family's company into the region. This equipment was later put to use building infrastructure for the *ihadists*. Osama bin Laden was doing what he knew. Osama bin Laden knew management from his university studies, and he knew civil engineering from his time working at the family's company while not attending school. Osama bin Laden, while in Afghanistan, did more than just selflessly support the *ihad*. He supervised the building of guesthouses. The first was in 1984 in Peshawar, *Beit-al-Ansar*, or the house of the faithful. Osama bin Laden associated projects such as the guest houses with himself personally. In doing this Osama bin Laden began to build a following.⁷ His time in Afghanistan is the first time Osama bin Laden is embracing a leadership role.⁸

Osama bin Laden did not just limit himself to management and construction projects away from the fighting. Osama bin Laden's following grew significantly as a result of his actions against the Soviets in direct combat. The weeklong battle of Jaji in April 1987, added much to Osama bin Laden's personal prestige. The battle of Jaji consisted of less than fifty Arabs holding off an attack by more than two-hundred Soviet troops who also had air support. The outnumbered Arabs held the Soviets off for more than a week before eventually withdrawing. This was the first instance in which an Arab force was able to hold that long. Osama bin Laden was among the leaders of that group. Osama bin Laden would continue to fight for the next four years participating in two

⁷ Oliver Roy, "Has Islamism a Future in Afghanistan?", in *Fundamentalism Reborn?*, ed William Maley (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 201.

⁸ Loehfelm, *Osama*, 41.

other important battles. He sustained a shrapnel wound at one point while fighting near the town of Jalabad. He recovered sufficiently to also participate in the battle at Ali-Kehl. Ali-Kehl proved to be one of the largest battles of the war. It was another Arab victory for which Osama bin Laden received some credit. Osama bin Laden's fame also grew as knowledge of him spread. He was well regarded for trading a life of privilege for the life of an average combatant. At one point Osama bin Laden was also thought to be invincible for having not been killed.

Once I was only thirty meters away from the Russians and they were trying to capture me. I was under bombardment, but I was so peaceful in my heart that I fell asleep... I saw a 120mm mortar shell land in front of me, but it did not blow up. Four more bombs were dropped from a Russian plane on our headquarters, but they did not explode.⁹

Soldiers wanted to fight alongside of him by the time the conflict was over. He was respected by his peers.

During the conflict Osama bin Laden collected information on as many of the fighters as he could. He took this information and created a database of reliable soldiers who he felt could be called upon at later times. This was the beginning of his organization, *Al-Qaeda*, or the base. It was considered a base of future Islamic armies. Another effect of this conflict was that it put the idea in mind that superpowers could in fact be defeated and that victory was a matter of resolve rather than one of relative size or strength. Osama bin Laden believed an Islamic army could defeat any nation in the world.

In addition to evolving as a public figure, Osama bin Laden was changing his personal values. It was also during his first four years that he worked closely with

⁹ Osama bin Laden, "Greetings America. My Name is Osama bin Laden," quoted by John Miller. *Esquire* (February 1999). http://www.esquire.com/features/articles/2001/010913_mfe_binladen_1.html

Azzam. Azzam changed Osama bin Laden in two ways during this period: he introduced him to leadership, and he solidified Osama bin Laden's beliefs about Islam. Osama bin Laden changed himself from one of the many sons of a construction magnate into a figure amongst Islamist fighters. While all this was happening he also changed on a personal level. He changed from the studious adolescent to a hard line figure. He shaped his interpretations about Islam while actively fighting for it. This undoubtedly made something that was already important to him the paramount thing in his life. His strict beliefs were formed during a period when he was in contact with violence on an everyday basis. Osama bin Laden became two things in Afghanistan, he became an Islamist leader with a modest following, and he became an Islamic fundamentalist who believed in violence.

IV

With the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan in February 1989, there was no longer any reason for the foreign fighters to remain. Osama bin Laden eventually made his way to Saudi Arabia. The change in him was evident right away. Instead of taking a job in the family construction business, settling down and raising a family, Osama bin Laden advocated *jihad*. Osama bin Laden had formed the belief that *jihad* is a process rather than a one time event. Osama bin Laden believed that *jihad* was the continuous struggle against Muslim oppression. Osama bin Laden believed especially that his *jihad* against the Soviets was blessed by Allah, Islam's God, and was therefore obligated to continue. The Saudi government was happy to allow Osama bin Laden to make statements and advocate armed struggle while in Afghanistan, but not in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government headed by, the royal family had done so much for the bin

Laden family, spoke with his family members on the importance of their brother's behavior, and how he needed to be quiet. The result was that he did become quiet, but without abandoning his beliefs.

His family was able to convince him of the need to change. Osama bin Laden changed a little, he advocated *jihad* less publicly, and took a wife. Everything appeared to have changed for Osama bin Laden, it seemed he was embarking on the life of comfort that everyone had expected him to live. This all changed when on August 1, 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait. The Iraqis had a number of reasons for invading Kuwait, most of them based on economics. This caused a reasonable fear that Iraq would follow its' attack on Kuwait with an attack on the Saudi Kingdom. Osama bin Laden used his family status to speak with the royal family. He advocated that his army, *Al-Qaeda*, could protect the kingdom and liberate Kuwait. The Saudi government instead chose the military assistance of an international coalition led by the United States.

The presence of US military in Saudi Arabia was an incomprehensible act to many Islamic fundamentalists. The United States, with by far the largest Christian population in the world, represented crusaders rather than defensive forces. Osama bin Laden protested vehemently and publicly against the US presence. History unfolded in January of 1991 with a resounding military success for the international coalition while Osama bin Laden's army of holy warriors had not been called upon. Osama bin Laden had personally been rejected, and an aspect of religion dear to him had been violated with the presence of Christian militaries in Saudi Arabia, the most holy place in Islam.

The Saudi Arabian government has severely restricted personal freedoms. While Osama bin Laden's privileged position allowed him more freedom than most, his protests

had crossed the line. He was again told to be quiet. When he chose to continue protests, he became a *persona non grata*, or unwelcome person in his home country. Osama bin Laden was forced to leave the kingdom. The Islamic government in Sudan, one of the poorest countries in the world, was happy to receive a person of Osama bin Laden's financial power.

V

Sudan represents another shift in Osama bin Laden's image. Osama bin Laden has become an exile for his dissenting beliefs. He is no longer capable of having any type of life that coincided with expectations of someone with his background. Osama bin Laden, in 1991, starts a new life in Sudan without many of the restrictions he previously faced from the Saudi government. Osama bin Laden was able to immigrate to Sudan largely as a result of the Sudanese leader, Hassan al Turabi, also a member of the Islamic Brotherhood. Although an exile, he still had access to the nearly unlimited funds from the family company. The result was that the bin Laden family money allowed Osama bin Laden a greater opportunity in Sudan than he had had in Saudi Arabia.

While in Sudan, Osama bin Laden became friends with important government figures. Osama bin Laden arranged help for the Sudanese with construction projects and in return he was given preferential business treatment. While in Sudan, Osama bin Laden established two sets of offices, one for legitimate businesses having to do with Sudan and the other *al Qaeda* offices. This is the first time Osama bin Laden has bartered his family's financial resources for freedom. Osama bin Laden helped the Sudanese and in return was given impunity to do whatever he wanted. Osama bin Laden began by exporting *jihad* throughout the world. He established a number of training camps. From

those camps, disenfranchised young Muslims were able to receive military training and receive transportation anywhere in the world to fight. The very best among these became members of Osama bin Laden's personal organization, *al Qaeda*.

In addition to exporting Islamic warriors from Sudan, Osama bin Laden also founded the Advice and Reform Committee to publicly oppose the policies of the Saudi regime and to expose their treatment of dissidents. The group attacked a number of government policies including the money spent to bring the Americans to defend the country as well as the legitimacy of the ruling family.¹⁰ Osama bin Laden waged a public relations campaign against those who had slighted him. Osama bin Laden demonstrated here that he is not someone who will simply go away because the Saudi government wants him to.

The US at this point begins to seriously take notice of Osama bin Laden's actions as a result of his public statements against the United States. A US State Department fact sheet on Osama bin Laden dated August 14, 1996 described him as "one of the most significant financial sponsors of Islamic extremist activities in the world today." The document explains many of the noteworthy actions taken by Osama bin Laden ranging from his financing of guesthouses in various Islamic countries to his support for an Egyptian terrorist group. It explains Osama bin Laden's reasons for leaving Saudi Arabia and relocating to Sudan. The pamphlet also gives in detail reasons why he is welcome in Sudan, thoroughly explaining his business activities ranging from construction, agriculture, import-export, to banking. The document also draws an important connection between Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, "the alleged mastermind of the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing, [who had] resided at the Bin Laden funded *Bayt Ashuhada* (house

¹⁰ Loehfelm, *Osama*, 69.

of martyrs) guesthouse in Peshawar during most of the three years before his apprehension in February 1995.”¹¹ Osama bin Laden has become a major international figure at this point in not only Saudi Arabia but also in the eyes of the United States. At this point this was a notoriety that was unwelcome. Bin Laden had preferred to remain in the background rather than become the face of international terrorism.

VI

Diplomatic pressure from the United States convinced al Turabi that it was in Sudan’s interest that the time had come for Osama bin Laden to leave. In the spring of 1996 Sudan expelled Osama bin Laden. Osama bin Laden taking a lesson from his own previous success had decisively funded the Taliban, one side of a civil war in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden and his financial access were welcomed into Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden had decisively provided the Taliban with hundreds of trucks that enabled them to fight decisively, retaking the majority of the country except for a small region in the north. This combined with Osama bin Laden’s personal history of fighting in Afghanistan made him a returning hero. The shift of Osama bin Laden to a financier that had occurred in Sudan had been repeated in Afghanistan.

At this point Osama bin Laden having been expelled first from Saudi Arabia, and then from Sudan because of his stance on the United States took action. It was from Afghanistan that Osama bin Laden issued his call to *jihad* against the United States. On August 23, 1996 from a mountaintop camp in Afghanistan Osama bin Laden outlined his reasons for *jihad* against the United States. The reasons included a continued occupation of Saudi Arabia, support for Israel, and for causing the deaths of Iraqis with sanctions.

¹¹ US State Department, *Usama bin Laden: Islamic Extremist Financier*, (Washington, DC: US State Department, August 14, 1996), 2.

During 1997, Osama bin Laden used his wealth to ensure Afghan hospitality would continue. He financed public projects such as roads and airstrips. Osama bin Laden also built a number of new training camps during this period. It was in 1998 that Osama bin Laden took a controversial step, he issued a *fatwa*, or religious edict. *Fatwas* can only be issued by clerics or courts, of which he was neither. In his declaration of a united pan-Islamic organization, he called on Muslims to attack American civilians as well as military targets. This was an important distinction between Osama bin Laden and others, he considered US civilians as valid targets while most others viewed civilians as protected by the *Koran*.

Another shift in Osama bin Laden's image has occurred. Osama bin Laden, by issuing a *fatwa*, and by condemning civilians, now projected himself as a religious leader. Osama bin Laden issued a *fatwa*, and in doing so projected himself as a religious authority. Osama bin Laden has projected himself as a religious leader, and distinguished himself from others with the same decisive act of issuing a *fatwa*.

VII

The next event that is fundamental to understand was the shift that occurred when Osama bin Laden began actively attacking Saudi Arabia and the United States. He is widely believed to be responsible for three attacks: Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the USS *Cole* in Yemen. Osama bin Laden's goals fundamentally changed. Osama bin Laden changed from speaking against the United States and Saudi Arabia to actively trying to harm them. On June 25, 1996 a truck exploded outside the Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia. This attack destroyed one building killing nineteen American soldiers and wounded hundreds of

civilians. The US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were attacked within five minutes of each other with truck bombs on August 7, 1998. A limited number of US personnel were killed, the majority of the dead were civilian bystanders. On October 12, 2000, the USS *Cole*, a US Navy Destroyer, was attacked in Yemen while it refueled, killing seventeen sailors. These three acts have been widely attributed to Osama bin Laden. There were also a number of other attacks against the United States during the time period in which *al Qaeda* is suspected.

These attacks were not only a shift from a passive noisemaking voice, the publication of accusations, but were significant shifts because large numbers of Muslims were hurt and killed. The *Koran* is widely interpreted as saying that peace toward all is a virtue, but that it also a significant sin to harm another Muslim. Osama bin Laden made a serious departure from that interpretation when he attacked especially the African embassies. There are two sides of this issue as well. By attacking the US directly, Osama bin Laden is being decisive, but by killing innocent Muslims, Osama bin Laden is being callous. Osama bin Laden explained his interpretation of the embassy deaths as their proximity to the US facilities made them targets. In order to not be an enemy of Islam a distance should have been maintained. In an interview with Jeune Afrique he explained his stance

Imagine if it was my own children were taken hostage, and that shielded by this human shield, Islam's enemies started to massacre Muslims. I would not hesitate, I would kill my children with my own hands. So one evil will have avoided an even greater evil. Sometimes, alas, the death of innocents is unavoidable. Islam allows that.¹²

¹² Osama bin Laden, "Strange Fatwas From Government Ulema," *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (April 24, 2001), 19.

His argument convinces some but further polarizes his relationship with Islam as he is said to interpret the *Koran* in ways that suit his own desires rather than the accepted interpretations.¹³

VIII

On September 9, 2001 two men posing as a camera crew went to interview the charismatic and competent leader of the northern alliance forces in Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Massoud. These two men were actually *al Qaeda* operatives on an assassination mission.¹⁴ Although they did not kill Massoud immediately, he died days later of his wounds. Osama bin Laden changed again with this verifiable incident. He has begun trading military forces for diplomatic protection. The Taliban wanted nothing more than to be in control of the entire country of Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden wanted protection from his increasingly hostile enemy the United States. The timing of this event is also significant. Two days later were the now infamous attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, and the Pentagon in Washington DC. Osama bin Laden had to have known that were the planned attacks to be successful he would need all the loyalty possible. This was the reason for the audacity of the attack against Ahmad Shah Massoud. The result of September 11, 2001 was an ultimatum delivered by the US to the Taliban, surrender Osama bin Laden or face an attack. The Taliban cited Afghan custom to not betray guests in refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden. Maybe another explanation is that his organization had just scored a tremendous victory on their behalf through the assassination. Osama bin Laden had struck what had become his greatest enemy and immediately before that, he guaranteed himself a sanctuary.

¹³ "Osama bin Laden: in the Name of Allah" *Biography*, A&E Home Video (2002).

¹⁴ Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War Inc.* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 163.

IX

The next shift in Osama bin Laden's odyssey was one that was forced upon him rather than one of his choosing. On March 11, 2004 a group of militants associated with Osama bin Laden's organization waged attacks on Madrid's subway system. This attack killed more than 200 people and was the catalyst for a change of government in Spain that led to the withdrawal of Spanish military forces from Iraq. Although indirectly responsible for the attack, it was not the attack which caused the shift but rather that one year later on March 10, 2005 the Commission of Spanish Muslims issued a *fatwa* against him. The *fatwa* declares that the attack on the Madrid subway is contrary to the Koran and should be condemned.¹⁵ It added that bin Laden and his organization are committing *istihlal* or interpreting the *Koran* for their own purposes. The *fatwa* specifically asserts that Osama bin Laden has become a *kafir*, or unbeliever as result of his stance that the death of innocent Muslims is acceptable. The *fatwa* goes on to state "Islam rejects terrorism in all its forms, whether it's the death of innocents or damage to their property."¹⁶ The commission bases their legitimacy on their representation of the one million Spanish Muslims. The *fatwa* is has also been recognized as valid by clerics in Morocco, Algeria, and Libya.

To Spain, the United States, and much of Western Europe this seems a significant event, Muslims taking action against Osama bin Laden. The question becomes how much effect will it really generate. Spanish Muslims are in fact Europeans. One problem is that there are also significant differences between Muslims living in different parts of the

¹⁵ " 'Terrorist Acts' of bin Laden 'totally banned'", CNN, (March 10, 2005)
<http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/03/10/spain.fatwa.osama.ap>

¹⁶ Islamic Commission of Spain, "Islamic Commission of Spain Issues a Fatwa Condemning Terrorism and the Al Qaida Group.", *Press Corner*, (April 1, 2005). <http://www.freemuslims.org/news/article.php?article=524>

world. Religion is very probably more important to the people of third world countries who have little more than survival tools, than it is to Spanish Muslims who enjoy a European quality of life. The *fatwa*, was issued by European Muslims but was also described favorably by Islamic organizations in Africa. Will the *fatwa* influence all Muslims throughout the world, probably not. However, it should have some effect in Spain and Africa. It adds to growing numbers who claim that Osama bin Laden is interpreting Islam for his own purposes.

To this point the paper has shown much of the evolution that occurs to Osama bin Laden's image. Osama bin Laden has changed from a rich child into a university student. He has changed from a university student into an Islamist warrior. He has changed from famous warrior to a dissident in his home country. Osama bin Laden has shown his adaptability as a dissident, funding projects for Sudan, and then for Afghanistan when necessary. Osama bin Laden has changed from a Saudi exile into an active enemy of the United States. Finally Osama bin Laden underwent an additional change becoming a formal enemy of Spanish Muslims when the Islamic Commission of Spain issued a *fatwa* against him.

X

At this juncture the paper will go into an analysis of the two other historical figures that provide some basis for comparison with Osama bin Laden. It is important to note that it is not being asserted that Osama bin Laden is similar to them. The frame of reference between them is too great to make direct comparisons. The other figures are offered as evidence of previous leaders. The first such figure will be Saladin, or Salah-ad-Din Yusuf ibn-Aiyub. Saladin led the Arabs during the Third Crusade. He was

responsible for significant victories including the retaking of Jerusalem.. The man was essentially larger than life. He was revered by those beneath him. He was feared by his enemies. He was hailed for his temperament, allowing conquered peoples some measures of freedom. Saladin was a genuine leader; He was loved by his people and respected by his enemies.

There are three surviving first hand sources that explain why Saladin was the leader he became: biographies written by his secretary, Imad-ad-Din al-Isfahani, biographies written by one of his ministers, Baha'-ad-Din, and finally numerous critical references in the *Historical Compendium* of Ibn-al-Athir the preeminent historian of the time. The variety of the sources strongly suggests that much of the information is true. The lack of sharply contrasting opinions between those who were in Saladin's immediate service and those of a dedicated historian of the time contributes to the strength of the records. These sources show a consensus opinion of Arabs at the time regarding Saladin as a warm man, and an effective leader.

There was a well documented occasion when Saladin was mediating a land dispute that showed the respect he enjoyed from his rivals. Two princes of rival states assisted Saladin in mounting his horse prior to the meeting ending. This was a way to show great respect for a person during the 12th century. For it to have been done by princes of rival states is a significant statement of Saladin's personal influence. If Saladin had been simply another ruler than that never would have taken place, however he was the most influential leader of the time. Another aspect of Saladin's character, was his tolerance. During his rise to power in Egypt the *caliphs*, or states, in Cairo utilized Jewish and Christian advisors. He allowed this as well as some of the privileges gained by them

as a result to remain, he took away their right to ride horses, while maintaining the legitimacy of petitions of grievance. Saladin also following the conquest of Jerusalem during the third crusade allowed Jewish people to return to Jerusalem and settle. Saladin through these actions accumulated the respect of all three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

At the same time that Saladin is held in esteem for his conduct, Andrew Ehrenkreutz points out that there are also differing opinions.

Most of Saladin's significant historical accomplishments should be attributed to his military and governmental experience, to his ruthless persecution and execution of political opponents and dissenters, to his vindictive belligerence and calculated opportunism, and to his readiness to compromise religious ideals to political expediency.¹⁷

How should Saladin be viewed? Saladin is viewed differently by different societies. To the Western world he is viewed as an Arab leader who through his own political maneuvering enjoyed significant success. To the Muslim world Saladin is much more, he is a revered hero, a model for all other leaders to follow. There is the popular view of Saladin the man who was loved and who accomplished much. For many, research stops there, however, to go beyond the popular image and to analyze his methods shows him to be a calculating man who used everything that was at his disposal. An in depth analysis would show the importance of results he achieved in shaping his image and his ability to change to suit 'political expediency' in order to continue his successes.

Saladin was destined to be a controversial figure if nothing else because of the significant success that he enjoyed. Saladin based on his success was guaranteed to be seen as a Arab hero. At the same time he was not generally considered a ruthless leader by his enemies. The fact that he was respected enough by his enemies despite the

¹⁷ Andrew S. Ehrenkreutz, *Saladin* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1972), 238.

significant losses he inflicted upon them is also a telling statement. Those that he waged an effective military campaign against had praise for him. He not only defeated these people militarily, but also took over their territory and governed them. The result has been that rather than opinions or statements regarding his brutality or insensitivity as a ruler, statements about his insistence on the maintenance of minority rights have occurred. This alone shows two things: the first that Saladin was an effective leader for having so much success, and the second is that he was a fair leader, he effectively managed his success.

There are a number of comparisons that can be drawn between Saladin and Osama bin Laden. They were both Islamic leader figures. However, while Saladin's leadership was legitimate, Osama bin Laden by not operating within a single state, but trying to become a pan-Islamic leader has a dubious authority. There are further important differences between Saladin and Osama bin Laden. Saladin represented the unified Islamic world, Osama bin Laden, on the other hand has sharply divided the Islamic world with the killing of what many see as innocent bystanders. Saladin was respected by his enemies, Osama bin Laden is not. Osama bin Laden has shown that he believes in the use of terrorism to achieve his message. Most people in the world will not look at terrorism as an acceptable means to share a message. Osama bin Laden is thought of poorly by his enemies for his use of terror rather than conventional conflict. The reality is that while he would have little to hope for if he were actively engaged with his enemies, his use of terror tactics is still condemned. The important characteristics that Saladin possessed as a leader are severely lacking in Osama bin Laden.

XI

Closer to Osama bin Laden's lifetime is the figure of the late Ayat-Allah Khomeini. Khomeini took power in January 1979, and died on June 3, 1989. Osama bin Laden witnessed much of Khomeini's actions firsthand. During the time of Khomeini's regime, Osama bin Laden was living in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. He believed that the revolution in Iran was an example for other Islamic nations to follow. Khomeini was seen as a popular hero for his role in ending the rule of the Shah.

Iran's urban population tripled during the period of 1956-76, while the rural population only grew by about thirty percent.¹⁸ Iran underwent an incredible urbanization. With this change poverty also grew and Islam spread among the new urban poor. Religious books were published, worship centers were built, Islam became an accepted characteristic. The growing popularity of Islam among the poor made it an acceptable choice for the middle class as well.¹⁹ While this was occurring, Iran was also undergoing significant political change. While the Shah's rule brought western technology to Iran, the government also became increasingly intolerant. The Iranian security forces were tasked to protect the power of the Shah and with nothing else. The result was increasingly the extensive use of brutal tactics.

This was the Iran that Khomeini returned to. He had been exiled for his views contrary to the government's. He chose to return only after the revolution had become well established, at the time most opportune for himself. The revolution had already taken place, the Shah had fled, the reality of the situation was that Khomeini's presence in Iran was not needed. He chose to return at the time for himself rather than any high

¹⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban For the Crown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

purpose. At the time of the revolution, Khomeini was in exile in Iraq. After the revolt had occurred he requested multiple times to be guaranteed passage back to Iran. The three-week old government had repeatedly denied his requests, fearing the impact of his return.²⁰ Khomeini defied the government's orders to stay away, and upon his return, he was welcomed back as a hero.²¹

Few believed that Khomeini would hold power for very long. He saw himself as a voice for the people.²² In one sense he was selfless. By actively continuing his opposition from exile he was actually working for his the benefit of the Iranians. He was able to wait until old age to attain power, to be seventy-nine before taking the leading role of a nation, is certainly a statement regarding his patience and commitment. However the opposite is more likely, that he had to wait that long, he wanted to be in power and was not able to be.

His actions upon gaining power are also very telling. On February 1, 1979 he returned from exile and riding an enormous outpouring of popular support, took control of the government. On February 15, he began the purges of the military by arresting four Army generals. When the man he chose for Prime Minister offered his resignation he only temporarily suspended trials for former regime members. By August 31 his Prime Minister had tried to resign on three different occasions. Changes were made by a recently elected assembly that gave Khomeini control over the military. On November 6, 1979 Bazargan's resigned from his post as Prime Minister in response to the US embassy situation. The next two weeks saw the transparency of government disappear. Those in power consolidated their power and decided their discussions should be secret.

²⁰ Robin Wright, *In the Name of God* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²² *Ibid.*, 43.

Khomeini's actions were those of shrewd man wanting to maintain his position.²³ His calculating actions speak to his true nature.

Khomeini was a strong international figure. He pressed the war with Iraq, when he was advised against it. He threatened Iraq's oil exports in defiance of the world. He was in general terms a pariah to the rest of the world. Khomeini believed that western capitalism, as well as Soviet communism were both contradictory to the goals of Islam, and therefore created his own path in international foreign policy.²⁴ Khomeini was an Islamist leader. He valued the religious purity of the revolution above international political allies, an almost unheard of stance.

Khomeini was an example during the lifetime of Osama bin Laden of what could be achieved. Although with the benefit of history he has proven himself to be self interested rather than a returning hero. At the time of his ascension to power there was not a more inspiring success story. While Khomeini's rise to power is admired in the Islamist world, Khomeini is not so popular elsewhere. Khomeini endorsed the actions of those attacked the US embassy in Iran. To the US he was an international problem, to the Muslim world he was a hero.

Important comparisons can also be made between Khomeini and Osama bin Laden. Khomeini was a decisive figure. His return to Iran generated enough public support for him to become the most important figure. Osama bin Laden seeks that level of public support but has yet to attain it. Osama bin Laden has undertaken efforts to influence others with little effect on his public image. Khomeini's revolution in Iran is viewed as the ideal for all Islamic states. The revolution which Khomeini rode to power

²³ Ibid., 218-220.

²⁴ Farhang Rajee, *Islamic Values and World View* (New York: University Press of America, 1983), 78.

involved very little conflict and bloodshed. By contrast Osama bin Laden uses tactics contrary to Khomeini's. Instead of nonviolent revolution he uses indiscriminate violence. Khomeini's tactics gained him popular support, and mild resistance, while Osama bin Laden's tactics have drawn some popular support but also draw strong opposition. Osama bin Laden is also very different from Khomeini. Khomeini completed training and became an Islamic holy man, or *mullah*. Khomeini though not a leader in his enemies' eyes was respected for the support that he enjoyed.

XII

The question now is how should Osama bin Laden be viewed? He has changed his beliefs and behaviors so many times. At one time he was totally acceptable to both the governments of his home country, and of the United States. The United States and the Arabs who traveled to Afghanistan to fight, including Osama bin Laden had a common enemy with in the presence of Soviets in Afghanistan. It is in Osama bin Laden's use of terror to spread his message that the world has disagreed with. Osama bin Laden is recognized as a legitimate popular force in the Islamic world but he is not thought of as strong enough to lead it. Additionally, he has not enjoyed the successes of his predecessors in Saladin and Khomeini. Osama bin Laden wants to be a pan-Islamic leader, but he has yet to become one.

Osama bin Laden has played an interesting game. After each terrorist attack during the 1990's he issued statements. He wanted to praise the acts of *jihad* but never take responsibility. Osama bin Laden, after the discovery and release of a videotape in which he explained how the September 11, 2001 attacks achieved more than he had

hoped,²⁵ has begun accepting responsibility for acts of terror. Osama bin Laden did not want to be the face of terrorism for a long time. He supported the struggle but never claimed responsibility. This supports the idea of Osama bin Laden may some day want a rapprochement with his home state, Saudi Arabia. However, in accepting responsibility for acts of terror, he may show that he has resigned himself to be a fugitive?

There are a number of prevalent opinions about the role of Osama bin Laden in history. The first is that he has been part of a larger apparatus in which he is not the most important figure but is among a number of important figures. “Ultimately the quintessence of bin Laden’s threat is his being a cog, albeit an important one, in a large system that will outlast his own demise, state-sponsored terrorism.”²⁶ Osama bin Laden was not the first perpetrator of international terrorism. He will certainly not be the last. However, he has played an important role in shaping the policies of the United States for the foreseeable future, and in defining issues in the Muslim world.

Other opinions support the idea that Osama bin Laden is merely a small part.

These terrorists are highly motivated, not by a cult of personality, but by a worldview in which they are the vanguard of a divinely ordained battle to liberate Muslim lands... The terrorists allied with Mr. Bin Laden do not want a place at the table; they want to shatter the table.²⁷

Osama bin Laden might well be less remembered for what he did, but for the division he caused by doing it. Osama bin Laden’s actions against the West have polarized the Muslim world.

A tiny minority of the nearly one billion Muslims worldwide cheered the devastating acts of September 11. The majority condemned his actions and

²⁵ Osama bin Laden, “Transcript of Usama bin Laden Video Tape,” *US Department of Defense, New Release* (13 December 2001), 1-7.

²⁶ Bodansky, *Bin Laden*, 406.

²⁷ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, “The New Face of Terrorism,” *The New York Times* (January 4, 2000), A23.

realized that the Prophet's teachings been wrenched out of context by Islamic fundamentalists to justify their own ends.²⁸

The majority of the Muslim world condemns violence. The interpretation used to justify attacks against civilians in the United States is a minority opinion. The result, however, has been that Muslims have been arbitrarily labeled as terrorists. Osama bin Laden's legacy may become the false prejudices now held against the world's Muslims.

The impact that has been seen as most important for Osama bin Laden has been his leadership in the maintaining of the *jihad*. Osama bin Laden has repeatedly stated that his life is of little importance because the fight will continue without him. Osama bin Laden has seen his own fair share of violence from both sides both as the perpetrator as well as the receiver, having actively fought in Afghanistan, but his greatest goal is to enable others to commit violence. Osama bin Laden's extensive financing of training camps, his organizing of *al-Qaeda*, have been organizational acts. Osama bin Laden wants to be remembered for the resurgence of *jihad*, not for his individual exploits.²⁹

Another opinion is that whatever one's views of him, Osama bin Laden will withstand the test of time. His actions, both the spectacular as well as the seemingly ordinary, have contributed to the fame that he now holds. "One can only hope Americans are beginning to understand that the concepts for which Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda have been fighting ... have stood and are standing the test of time."³⁰ The idea is that Osama bin Laden is both representing and creating a popular movement. Osama bin Laden promotes issues that are rallying cries for the vast majority of people in the Middle East. Is Osama bin Laden simply the instrument of deep seeded anger?

²⁸ Adam Robinson, *Bin Laden Behind the Mask of A Terrorist* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 286.

²⁹ Randal, *Osama*, 285.

³⁰ Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies Eyes* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2002), 262.

Another possibility is that Osama bin Laden simply wants to be allowed back into Saudi Arabia. The division today in Saudi Arabia is represented by the two most influential members of the royal family. Prince Nayaf who is the interior minister, is partial to the radical Islamists. Prince Abdullah favors reconciliation with the West. It is possible that Osama bin Laden is trying to gain enough popular support to be allowed back into his home country.³¹

What is likely the best estimation of Osama bin Laden's impact comes from Peter L. Bergen in his book *Holy War Inc.* He writes:

The events of September 11, 2001, represent a faultline in American history. The blithe days of dot-com billionaires, Puff Daddy's legal problems, and Gary Condit's evasions about the missing Chandra Levy have disappeared like a delightful mirage. America is now a different country.³²

September 11, 2001 affected the United States in the same way that December 7, 1941 did. A generation of Americans will remember where they were at that moment they learned of the attacks. Perhaps Osama bin Laden's greatest impact will be the dramatic change he caused on a single day in September.

Any judgment of Osama bin Laden, will have to incorporate a number of conflicting ideas. Osama bin Laden has repeatedly transformed himself to achieve a new image. He is not a leader to all, but is a leader to some. To many Muslims he is a murderer, whereas for others he is an instrument of Allah. To some in the West he is an Islamist doing everything in his power to resurrect the pristine glory of Islam by challenging the hegemonic Western imperialism in a post-colonial world; To many others, he is a criminal, plain and simple. The reality about Osama bin Laden is the lack

³¹ Michael Scott Doran, "The Saudi Paradox," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83 Issue 1 (Jan/Feb2004), 35.

³² Bergen, *Holy War*, 234.

of consensus. His impact has been undeniable but his nature is still unknown. Will the future clarify the true nature of this shifting silhouette?

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