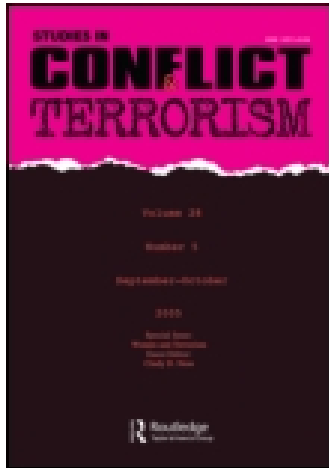


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DON D. CHIPMAN^a

^a Montgomery, Alabama, USA

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Osama bin Laden and Guerrilla War

DON D. CHIPMAN

Montgomery, Alabama, USA

Is Osama bin Laden just an evil person or is he a thoughtful, determined adversary with a well-planned strategy? This article outlines how bin Laden, as a mujahideen fighter in the Soviet Afghanistan War, became familiar with Mao's protracted guerrilla concept, and how he later proclaimed its significance in developing his Jihad warfare strategy.

Nevertheless, it must be obvious to you that, due to the imbalance of power between our armed forces and the enemy forces, a suitable means of fighting must be adopted i.e. using fast moving light forces that work under complete secrecy. In other word to initiate a guerrilla war.

Osama bin Laden, 1996
*Declaration of War Against The
Americans Occupying The Land
Of The Two Holy Places*

After the September 11 attacks on America Sir Michael Howard, an English scholar of great renown, claimed Secretary of State Colin Powell made an egregious mistake when he declared that the United States was at war with terrorism. In Howard's estimation, bin Laden was little more than a criminal and the American war declaration provided him with the undue "status and dignity" of a soldier.¹ Since the British fought terrorism in Ireland, Malaysia, and Cyprus, Howard suggested there were lessons to learn from these experiences. For example, these conflicts were called "emergencies" and not wars, because fighting terrorists requires "secrecy, intelligence, political sagacity, quiet ruthlessness, covert actions that remain covert, above all infinite patience." Moreover, when war is declared, explained Howard, there is an immediate expectation of a military offensive and all of these critical antiterrorist conditions "are forgotten or overridden in a media-stoked frenzy for immediate results and nagging complaints if they do not get them."²

Yet the overt and deadly terrorist strikes in New York and Washington, DC demanded that the U.S. president do something and do it quickly. Americans pay taxes to promote the common defense and the September 11 attacks indicated there were serious national security problems.³ When the president learned who was involved in the

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Address correspondence to Don D. Chipman, PhD, 2757 S. Colonial Dr., Montgomery, AL 36111, USA. E-mail: don.chipman@maxwell.af.mil

attacks, he began labeling bin Laden as the “evil one” and his Al Qaeda organization as “evildoers.”⁴ Consequently, with Michael Howard claiming bin Laden was a criminal and Washington officials alleging that Al Qaeda was a product of the Mephistophelean world, America’s war against terrorism began in an environment of obfuscation.⁵

Yet recent insights into bin Laden’s agenda indicate that he is more than an evildoer or a criminal. Indeed, he is a cold blooded, calculating foe, who in the planned attacks on America, demonstrated an insightful strategy of knowing how to use terrorism as a means of promoting his political ends.⁶ Let there be no doubt, stated one scholar, bin Laden is “a distinctly modern man with a very coherent strategy of attack.”⁷

At the heart of bin Laden’s agenda is his desire to establish a pure Islamic state in Saudi Arabia. He began this campaign in 1996 when he issued a formal document (*fatwa*) entitled, the “Declaration of War against the Americans occupying the land of the Two Holy Places.”⁸ Peter Bergen, an Oxford scholar who has studied bin Laden, claims that Al Qaeda’s leader has “made no secret of the fact that he was interested in fomenting a revolution in Saudi Arabia.”⁹

Bin Laden was fully aware of the consequences of his planned strikes on America. The attacks were designed as a military operation to gain support for his vision of creating a Middle East “caliphate” where Koranic laws (Sharia) reign supreme.¹⁰ There is no doubt, explained Bergen, that “bin Laden is at war with the United States.” Moreover, it “is a political war, justified by his own understanding of Islam, directed at the symbols and institutions of American political power.”¹¹

Throughout the 1990s bin Laden sent trained terrorists into Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and into any country that he believed had compromised Islamic ideals. In addition, he supported radical Muslim organizations in Kosovo, India, Indonesia, Palestine, Chechnya, and the Philippines. Ultimately, noted *Jane’s Defense Review*, Osama wanted to become the symbol of resistance against the big Satan (America) and the little Satan (Israel).¹²

In his drive for power, bin Laden reinforced his fighting doctrine with a radical interpretation of the Islamic religion. He used these precepts in the same way Lenin used Karl Marx’s theory to initiate the Bolshevik revolution. Both Lenin and bin Laden claimed the West was crushing their social and economic well being, corrupting commoners and thus derailing the inevitable historical march toward their respective utopias. Both Lenin and bin Laden believed that if Western societies were neutralized, then the “good people,” be they proletarians or radical Muslims, could continue the trek toward their inevitable destinies.¹³ Whereas Lenin fought for a new social-economic communist state, bin Laden projected a vision of a pure Islamic caliphate.¹⁴ Both believed that their ends justified the use of unrestrained violence as a means.¹⁵

The September 11 strikes on America, therefore, were not isolated terrorist acts planned by a mystical evil one or a criminal. Instead, the attacks were designed to rally support for bin Laden and his vision of a new Islamic caliphate. In a December 2001 Pentagon-issued videotape, bin Laden clearly acknowledged that the American strikes were designed to send a loud message to the world that could be readily “understood by both Arabs and non-Arabs—even the Chinese.”¹⁶ The attacks were designed to encourage the “good believers” and the “strong believers” to support “the greatest Jihad in the history of Islam.”¹⁷

At one point in the video, bin Laden wondered if support for his cause was growing. Certainly, answered a colleague. Before the attacks “hundreds of people used to doubt you and few only would follow you until this huge event happened. Now hundreds of people are coming out to join you.” Yes, noted bin Laden, when people see a strong and weak horse, “by nature they will like the strong horse.”¹⁸ *Jane’s Intelligence*

Review claims that bin Laden hoped the September 11 attacks would be the first steps of initiating a widespread Jihad. The Al Qaeda leader expected the United States would become enraged, viciously counterattack, and thus cause untold destruction. Then, no doubt, the world would realize that America was a great Satan, and Muslims from around the world would rally in support of bin Laden's agenda.¹⁹

Between 1996 and 2002, bin Laden used Afghanistan as a base for his militancy. During these years he contributed more than \$100 million in cash and military aid to Mulla Omar and the Taliban government.²⁰ A CIA report suggested that he provided the Taliban with "some of its most committed and effective assault forces" and that basically he "owned and operated" them.²¹ As an indication of this fact, some experts believe bin Laden, not the Taliban commander, Mulla Omar, ordered the destruction of the two ancient Buddha statues in central Afghanistan.²² Because bin Laden controlled most of the Taliban military, he is different from other terrorists. "Perhaps," stated Norman Friedman, "it would be better to think of the current problem as an attack by a government that, having only very limited resources at home, chose a covert kind of military action to spread itself."²³

Not only has bin Laden clearly outlined his political goals, he has also divulged his means. He has implemented a guerrilla war strategy. In his 1996 Declaration of War on America, he clearly stated that "fast moving light forces that work under complete secrecy," were necessary "to expel the occupying enemy out of the country of the two Holy Places." Therefore we must "initiate a guerrilla warfare."²⁴

Bin Laden learned about guerrilla strategy in the 1980s when he fought with Afghanistan Mujahideen forces against the Soviets. In December 1979, the U.S.S.R. invaded Afghanistan and immediately afterward, Osama headed to Pakistan and began establishing an organization to recruit and train Mujahideen guerrillas. Known as the "Mujahideen Services Office," this bureau eventually evolved into the Al Qaeda terrorist organization with bin Laden as its CEO. He believed, as did all the Mujahideen that fighting against the Russians was a justified Jihad, because they were in a contest against invading Soviet atheists. Moreover, stated bin Laden, fighting "one day in Afghanistan was like one thousand days of praying in an ordinary mosque."²⁵

During the war, the Mujahideen confronted one of the world's greatest military powers, yet they outlasted the Soviets and eventually forced them to retreat. Mujahideen strategy focused on protracting the war, forcing it into a stalemate, and waiting for Russian political and economic support to erode. Ahmed Shah Massoud, one of the more prominent Mujahideen commanders, employed Mao Zedong's guerrilla warfare strategy against the Soviets. Known as the Lion of the Panjshir, Massoud's small army continuously fought off Russian advances. Between 1980 and 1987 the Soviets conducted nine military offensives in the Panjshir Valley. Nine times Massoud's Mujahideen guerrillas successfully escaped the Soviet's scorched earth offensives.²⁶

Each time the Soviets advanced, Massoud and his guerrillas followed Mao's instructions and quickly retreated into the mountains, exchanging time and space for a chance to attack later. After the Soviets expended their arsenal, Massoud reorganized his forces, maneuvered into position, and ambushed the retreating Russians. "The ability to run away," stated Mao, "is precisely one of the characteristics of the guerrillas." Indeed, "running away is the chief means of getting out of passivity and regaining the initiative."²⁷

Massoud's understanding of guerrilla doctrine came from his intense study of Mao's writings. Consequently, stated Afghan historian Mark Urban, the Lion of Panjshir "grasped the importance of the key elements of guerrilla warfare: surprise, organization, rapid concentration, and dispersal of forces. . . ." In these respects the Massoud was, and by

and large remains, far ahead of the other Mujahideen.”²⁸ Moreover, Massoud altered the traditional Afghan tactics away from fighting for tribal prestige and acquiring loot to employing guerrilla tactics. Because of this, noted Urban, Massoud “attained the status of a superstar.” He was constantly teaching Maoist concepts and actively “trained Mujahideen in other regions.”²⁹

Eventually, bin Laden and Massoud’s paths crossed. Carrying in donations from Saudi Arabia, bin Laden met various Afghan Mujahideen party leaders including Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military commander, Massoud.³⁰ Undoubtedly Osama initially learned about guerrilla warfare strategy in some of these encounters. During the 1990s, these earlier impressions were amplified by the advice of Al Qaeda’s first military commander, Abu Ubadiyah al-Banshiri. As a Mujahideen commander, Al-Banshiri had fought against the Soviets in the Panjsher Valley. Later, he became one of Osama’s most influential advisors and according to one scholar, he “won Osama’s heart and dominated his mind.”³¹

Within Mao’s guerrilla strategy, terrorism is a basic tactic. During his protracted war (1927 to 1949) against Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists, Mao often used terrorism. For him it was necessity. Mao’s biographer, Philip Short, noted that the great Red Chinese leader believed terrorism was “indispensable to the communist cause.” Often Mao formed execution squads “to massacre the landlords and the despotic gentry as well as their running dogs without the slightest compunction.”³²

Similar to Mao, the Mujahideen used terrorism as a tactic in the form of assassinations, covert satchel bomb attacks, and massive unguided rocket strikes—often against civilian targets. In September 1984, a Mujahideen commander exploded a bomb in the Kabul Airport killing over 30 and injuring over 200 innocent youngsters and bystanders.³³ These tactics and other guerrilla warfare lessons were also a part of bin Laden’s military schooling as a Mujahideen fighter.

After the September 11 attack, a Pakistani journalist, Hamid Mir, was blindfolded and taken to an interview with bin Laden. According to Mir, bin Laden claimed he possessed and would use “chemical and nuclear weapons.” At this point, bin Laden stated that if the Americans should capture key Afghan cities, the Taliban and his Al Qaeda forces would move into the mountains. From there, he noted, “we will continue our guerrilla warfare against the Americans.”³⁴

After the initial shock of September 11 faded, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, and the president moved beyond the tendency of labeling bin Laden a criminal or an evil one. Moreover, they recognized that the September 11 terrorist attacks were tactics carried out within an overall political strategy. “Terrorism,” noted one scholar, “first and foremost is a political problem.”³⁵ Basically, it is the announcement of these designated political goals that distinguishes terrorism from random acts of violence committed by either criminals or the insane.

Since 1996, bin Laden’s political goals have focused on ridding the Americans from the land of the two Holy Places and establishing a pure Islamic state in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, he intends to use guerilla warfare in which terror is a means to achieve this end. Similar to other statesmen, he has announced these political goals in many manifestos and on television. Immediately after September 11, he appeared on Al-Jazeera’s television network and informed over 34 million potential viewers of his agenda. Ironically, “for someone who scorned modernity and globalization, and who took refuge in an Islamic state that banned television,” noted one writer, “bin Laden proved remarkably adept at public diplomacy.”³⁶

Fundamentally, drug dealers, Mafia dons, and the insane may use vague political statements to mask their extortion activities, yet their lack of distinct political goals sets

them apart as criminals and not as belligerents. Terrorism, explained Caleb Carr in his book *The Lessons of Terror*, is different. Ultimately, it is:

the contemporary name given to, and the modern permutation of, warfare deliberately waged against civilians with the purpose of destroying their will to support either leaders or policies that the agents of such violence find objectionable.³⁷

Bin Laden's stated political goals and his attacks were the obvious signs of an organized war effort. Similar to other military campaigns, his Al Qaeda combatants received orders, planned their tactics, and carried out their attacks, all within a designated guerrilla strategy. The initial shots of this war were fired in 1996 against the Americans in Khobar Towers, then against the U.S. embassies in Africa, and later against the USS *Cole*. The second round came on September 11. This guerrilla war is being organized and run by a cold blooded strategist, Osama bin Laden, who in the fall of 2001 was using Afghanistan as a sanctuary. Because this is a complex war and not an emergency, it requires, as U.S. Army General Tommy Franks noted, an effective, thoughtful strategy with not only boots on the ground, but more importantly it requires "eyes on the ground."³⁸

Once Washington determined that bin Laden was the aggressor, in early October, President George W. Bush authorized General Franks, U.S. Central Command's Combatant Commander, to begin military operations against Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. A prime aspect of America's strategy was the deployment of U.S. Special Forces and CIA agents into Afghanistan, where they fought with the anti-Taliban forces known as the Northern Alliance. Eventually these American "eyes on the ground" planned military operations, coordinated air strikes, and participated with the Northern Alliance in a series of successful battles against enemy forces.

Of all the key engagements, none was more important than the battle for Mazar-e Sharif. In early November, coordinated air and ground attacks forced the Taliban to abandon Mazar-e Sharif. Shortly afterward, falling like dominos, the Northern Alliance and their allies captured Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, and Talogan. Then, in early December, Taliban and Al Qaeda forces retreated from Kandahar and headed into the mountains where they continued fighting a defensive guerrilla war.³⁹

Fortunately for the Americans, Taliban and Al Qaeda soldiers began the war by defending their cities through the use of a conventional positional strategy. South of Mazar-e Sharif, the Taliban fought the Northern Alliance from trenches and bunkers using tanks, mortars, artillery, and sniper fire.⁴⁰ For the most part, they played into the hands of America's military strength by congregating in accessible areas where air and ground strikes could take their toll. Once located, American Special Forces used high-powered telescopes, global positioning receivers, hand-held laser range finders, and radios that allowed them to send maps and close-up photographs to loitering aircraft that then accurately attacked the targets. When these strikes were combined with a ground offensive, the enemy was overwhelmed.⁴¹

Although these victories were significant, Taliban leader Mulla Omar, Osama bin Laden, and his chief deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri have yet to be captured. One report, however, estimates that nearly a third of bin Laden's closest associates have been killed. Of significance, Mohammed Atef, Al Qaeda's top military commander, and two other key terrorist commanders were slain.⁴² In addition, another 550 Al Qaeda operatives are now being held in confinement.⁴³ For the most part, bin Laden no longer has unhindered

freedom to plan his terrorist attacks. By keeping him and his Al Qaeda operatives on the run, the United States has diminished his effectiveness.

When America began the war, President George W. Bush outlined three basic military objectives. First, he wanted the U.S. military to enter Afghanistan and destroy all of the terrorists' sanctuaries. Next, they needed to dismantle the Al Qaeda organization and incapacitate Taliban military capabilities. Finally, for his dastardly strikes against America, the president wanted bin Laden brought to justice.⁴⁴ By May 2002, all but the last objective had been achieved.

Yet as long as bin Laden and his Al Qaeda operatives remain at large, the threat continues. Let there be no doubt, noted *Jane's Intelligence Review*, bin Laden's "ideological umbrella of terrorist philosophy," is still very popular among radicals.⁴⁵ Where there are isolated cauldrons of hatred, there are also endless conspiracy theories of how the West forced the Muslims to abandon their "divine heritage of Islam," explained Bernard Lewis. "That is the way of the Iranian revolution and of the so-called fundamentalist movements and regimes in various Muslim countries."⁴⁶

However, among most Muslims, bin Laden is not a man of destiny. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, after an initial wave of support following the September 11 attacks, Arab opinion began changing. The quick and overwhelming U.S. and Northern Alliance victories in Afghanistan and the rapid fall of the Taliban quickly dampened Osama's support. America, which was seen as "unable to secure a definitive victory over its foes," was suddenly viewed in a more positive light. In part, this sentiment changed because many Arabs did not want to back a loser. In general, noted one journalist, most Middle Easterners see the Taliban and Al Qaeda organizations as an introverted—suicidal version of Islamic doctrine and this has caused "deep psychological scars of pain, despair, and fury among Arabs and Muslims."⁴⁷

Bin Laden wanted to provoke a clash between West and Middle East cultures by initiating a guerrilla war. But in the end, it was Muslim citizens who undermined his efforts. It was Northern Alliance soldiers, Hamid Karzai's rebels, and Pakistan's leaders that helped ensure that bin Laden and his Al Qaeda forces were on the run. Hopefully, bin Laden does not have easy access to any nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons. If he does not, then he must continue his dedicated guerrilla warfare strategy by conducting isolated bombing attacks and assassination attempts. Ultimately, commented Peter Bergen, "Bin Laden tried to provoke a clash of civilizations, and it turned out to be a huge dud."⁴⁸

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5. Ibid.

6. John F. Burns, "Bin Laden Taunts U.S. and Praises Hi-Jackers." *New York Times*, 8 October 2001), p. 1. In a videotape, bin Laden referred to President Bush as "the head of international infidels."

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