

Obit: Osama bin Laden (1957–2011)

Written by Eric Walberg

Wednesday, 04 May 2011 23:48

Osama bin Laden was born 10 March 1957 in Riyadh to Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden, a Yemeni-born Saudi construction billionaire with close ties to the Saudi royal family, and was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan 2 May 2011 in a CIA-directed targeted assassination.

He was the 17th of 52 children, the only son of Mohammed bin Laden's tenth wife, the Syrian beauty Alia Ghanem, who Mohammed divorced soon after Osama's birth. She remarried and Osama grew up



with his mother, stepfather and their four children. He studied economics and business administration at King Abdulaziz University and wrote poetry, inherited an estimated \$300m in 1967, and had five wives and 24 children.

A devout Wahhabi, he rose to fame quickly following the occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet troops in 1979, when US president Jimmy Carter authorised massive funding of mujahideen in Afghanistan and Pakistan and president Ronald Reagan launched his war against the "evil empire", the ailing Soviet Union, in 1981. The charismatic 22-year-old Osama bin Laden joined what he may at least initially have been unaware was a US-sponsored jihad, following his own agenda to liberate Muslim lands from foreign occupation, personally recruiting 4,000 volunteers from his own country.

In 1984, bin Laden established *Maktab al-Khadamat*, which funneled money (including much of his own inheritance), arms and Muslim fighters from around the Arabic world into the Afghan war. The US channeled funds and arms through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, and the CIA insists "they had no direct link to bin Laden," despite Reagan's frequent praise for mujahideen as Afghanistan's "freedom fighters", going as far as hosting them in the White House in 1983.

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Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, Osama bin Laden returned to his homeland in 1990, hailed in the Saudi media as a hero of jihad, who along with his Arab legion, "had brought down the mighty superpower" of the Soviet Union. However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and Saddam Hussein's pan-Arab republicanism suddenly put the Saudi monarchy at risk, and bin Laden offered King Fahd his mujahideen fighters to protect the kingdom, warning him not to depend on non-Muslim troops. Bin Laden believed the presence of foreign troops in the "land of the two mosques" (Mecca and Medina) profaned sacred soil, and when King Fahd allowed the US to station 300,000 troops and to launch its invasion of Iraq from Saudi soil, bin Laden turned against the monarchy and fled into exile in Sudan in 1992.

He is credited with founding Al-Qaeda (foundation) in 1988, initially focused on driving the Soviets from Afghanistan, but later to rid all Muslim lands -- including Saudi Arabia -- of imperialist occupation. As such, he was credited with masterminding terrorist attacks against Western targets from the 1990s on, culminating in the destruction of the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 (which bin Laden denied carrying out). At the time of his death, he was indicted on terrorism charges by law enforcement agencies in New York City (1998), Tripoli, Libya (1998) and Madrid (2004).

The relationship between the US government and bin Laden/ Al-Qaeda is still very much an enigma, and with bin Laden's assassination at American hands, will likely remain so. The major terrorist events in the mid-1990s were not associated with bin Laden, who decamped to Afghanistan from Sudan in 1996 after Bill Clinton refused Sudan's offer to extradite him. Instead, Clinton destroyed a pharmaceuticals plant in Sudan and, a year later, dropped a few bombs in a remote Afghan valley where it was rumored bin Laden was training his jihadis. The US military's Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia were bombed in 1996, followed in 1997 by the Luxor massacre of 62 local Egyptians and tourists and the 1998 car bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, all while bin Laden was *incommunicado* in a remote Afghan mountain cave.

After 9/11, US president George W Bush, like Clinton earlier, refused to negotiate the Taliban hand-over of bin Laden (the Taliban offered to extradite him to a third country to ensure a fair investigation and trial), and instead launched a full-scale war against an entire nation. Subsequent videotapes where bin Laden belatedly acknowledges masterminding 9/11 are disputed, both their authenticity and to what extent they prove actual involvement in 9/11. The evidence against the man-in-a-cave-in-Afghanistan as mastermind of 9/11 is belied by compelling testimony of public figures and scientists that the official 9/11 Commission Report is a cover-up.

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The use of Osama bin Laden by both the liberal and neocon factions in US politics and then their refusal to nip the bin Laden myth in the bud can only be explained one way: bin Laden was a useful foil for imperial plans to invade Afghanistan and then Iraq, and he was worth more as a spectre -- to fight anywhere they pleased in a nebulous "war against terror" -- than as a prisoner with potentially embarrassing facts to reveal.

This chapter of US policy was finally brought to a close in the early hours of 2 May, when US special forces launched a helicopter-borne assault on a compound in Abbottabad, 50 km northeast of Islamabad, home to the country's main military training institution, the Pakistan Military Academy. According to WikiLeaks, the CIA had known about bin Laden's whereabouts since 2005 -- at the very least since last August, and as was the case under Clinton and Bush before him, Obama made no attempt to take him alive, his captors shooting him in the head.

Bin Laden was killed along with his son, the bodies whisked away by helicopter and dumped 1100 km away at sea, in defiance of Islamic custom. Bin Laden's second-in-command, Egyptian-born Ayman Al-Zawahiri, remains at large and is presumably *de facto* head of Al-Qaeda.

The assassination, instead of capture, of what Obama, apparently without irony, called "a mass murderer of Muslims", ensures the truth behind the spectre remains a mystery. The delay can only be seen as a calculated one -- Obama's version of the "October surprise", a dramatic event stage-managed to boost the presidential incumbent's chances in the next election. The decision to put paid to this spectre at long last also suggests that US plans for Afghanistan are entering a new stage.

The assassination recalls the operation to kill Ernesto Che Guevara, captured and immediately executed by the CIA-backed Bolivian government troops in 1967. His body was similarly helicoptered away to an unmarked grave in a vain attempt to bury his legacy of hope.

Al-Qaeda's indiscriminate terror against civilians as part of the effort to liberate Muslim lands was mistaken, killing both Shia and Sunni in Iraq, undermining religious rivals such as Hezbollah, Hamas and secularists such as Saddam Hussein and Moammar Gaddafi, resulting in harsh retribution against Muslims in the Balkans and Chechnya, curiously leaving Israel unharmed. The passing of this tragic period in the history of Islam will not be mourned.

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Nonetheless, like Guevara, bin Laden died honourably, fighting the invaders. Like Guevara, he has entered the realm of martyrdom, a symbol of Islamic resistance to all forms of occupation of the Muslim world, both Communist and imperialist, and will continue to inspire Muslims enraged by the actions of those intent on imposing a Western lifestyle in league with their Muslim collaborators.

Oh Abbottabad we are leaving you now

To your natural beauty do I bow

Perhaps your winds' sound will never reach my ear

My gift for you is a few sad tears

I bid you farewell with a heavy heart

Never from my mind will your memories thwart.

Major James Abbott (1861)