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Holy War, Inc.

Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden

The Free Press
CHAPTER 1

While America Slept

"I have always dreamed," he mouthed, fiercely, "of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity..."

—Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent

September 11, 2001, was the kind of morning when everything seemed right with the world. On the East Coast of the United States, the air was cool and clear, the sky a limitless, cloudless, azure blue. It was a very American morning, somehow. It was the perfect morning to take a dog for a walk, to stop for a coffee and bagel on the way to work. And it was the perfect morning for flying.

That was a matter of vital importance to the nineteen Middle Eastern men who boarded flights leaving Boston, Newark, and Washington for the West Coast. Any weather-related delay, however slight, could sabotage their carefully synchronized plans to wreak unimaginable havoc against their enemy, the United States of America.

At 7:45 A.M., American Airlines flight 11 left Boston for Los Angeles, followed thirteen minutes later by United Airlines flight 175,
which had the same destination. Within three minutes, United Airlines flight 93 left Newark for San Francisco. At 8:10 A.M., American flight 77 left Washington’s Dulles Airport for Los Angeles.¹

Armed with boxcutters and knives, the men quickly seized control of the four planes and steered them to their targets in Manhattan and Washington. At 8:45 A.M., American flight 11—laden, like the other planes, with fuel for its long haul—slammed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, setting off a giant fireball inside the building. Twenty minutes later, United flight 175, now in effect a massive flying bomb, crashed into the South Tower. Within an hour and a half, both skyscrapers had collapsed. At 9:39 A.M., American flight 77 plowed into the side of the Pentagon.² Only the heroism of passengers who fought the hijackers on United flight 93 prevented its use in another kamikaze attack. After a struggle, the details of which will never be known, the jet went down southeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at 10:10 A.M., killing all on board.

In little more than an hour, more than five thousand Americans perished: the most catastrophic act of terrorism in the history of the United States. And Americans were not the only victims of this unimaginable crime. Also killed were men and women from more than fifty other countries, among them Great Britain, which, having lost more than two hundred of its citizens, had experienced the most deadly act of terrorism in its history too. Until that grim morning, the average American was statistically more likely to be killed by a bolt of lightning than an act of terrorism. But everything had now changed.³

The dual attacks in New York and Washington were the deadliest salvo in Osama bin Laden’s holy war against the United States—a war that had begun almost a decade earlier with the little-noticed bombing of a Yemen hotel that housed American soldiers. An Australian tourist was the sole casualty of that assault, but with every passing year the attacks became more sophisticated and more deadly. The bombings in 1998 of two U.S. embassies in Africa killed more than two hundred people; the October 2000 bombing of an American warship, the U.S.S. Cole, in Yemen left seventeen American sailors dead.

A terrible irony is that among the World Trade Center victims was John O’Neill, who probably knew more about bin Laden than anyone in the U.S. government: he had led the FBI investigation of the em-
bassy bombings and the attack on the Cole. A blustery, can-do man who did not endear himself to more bureaucratically minded officials in the U.S. government, O'Neill had retired from the Bureau only two weeks before and gone to work as the head of security at the Trade Center. He died trying to rescue people.

Although the September attacks came as an utter surprise, there had been indications that bin Laden was planning to strike the United States sometime during the summer of 2001. In June the U.S. embassy in Yemen was temporarily closed when some of bin Laden's followers were arrested with explosives and maps of the area. In New Delhi that same month, two men detained by Indian police said they were planning to blow up the busy visa section of the U.S. embassy on the orders of a bin Laden lieutenant. In July, the State Department warned of "strong indications that individuals may be planning imminent terrorist actions against U.S. interests in the Arabian Peninsula."

The clearest signal that bin Laden plotted more attacks against American targets was a skillfully edited two-hour al-Qaeda recruitment tape that circulated widely in the Middle East during the summer—in keeping with bin Laden's pattern of subtly telegraphing his intentions.

On the tape, bin Laden and his closest advisers make impassioned speeches about Muslims being attacked in Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Indonesia, and Egypt—speeches that are laid over graphic footage of Muslims being killed, beaten, and imprisoned. For bin Laden, however, the greatest insult to Muslims remains the continued presence of Americans in the holy land of Arabia. "These Americans brought...Jewish women who can go anywhere in our holy land," he says. The charge that "Arab rulers worship the God of the White House" is made over images of the Saudi royal family meeting American leaders such as Colin Powell.

"If you don't fight," says bin Laden, "you will be punished by God." The Saudi exile then outlines the solution to the problems Muslims face: They should travel to Afghanistan to be tutored in the arts of holy war. The tape shows a hundred or so of bin Laden's masked followers training at his al-Farooq camp in eastern Afghanistan, holding up black flags and chanting in Arabic, "Fight evil!" The fighters shoot off anti-aircraft guns and RPGs, run across obstacle courses, and blow up...
buildings; bin Laden himself lets off some rounds from an automatic rifle. The tape also shows, on the same obstacle courses, dozens of young boys, many no older than eleven, dressed in military camouflage and firing weapons.

On the tape bin Laden makes his most explicit references yet to al-Qaeda’s role in a series of anti-American operations, including the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kenya. It was attacked, he says, because “it was considered to be the biggest intelligence-gathering center in East Africa. With the help of God, the hit against it was very strong against the Americans. This is so the Americans can taste something of what we Muslims have tasted.” Bin Laden also rejoices in the attack on the Cole: “Your brothers in Aden hit the Cole. They destroyed this destroyer which, when you see it moving through the water, makes you frightened. She had the illusion she could destroy everything and then this small boat bobbing in the waves collided with the destroyer. When the collision happened, it was the beginning of the war.”

Toward the tape’s end, bin Laden implies that there will be more action against the United States: “The victory of Islam is coming. And the victory of Yemen will continue.” A Middle Eastern source familiar with the al-Qaeda organization told me that weeks before the Trade Center attacks there was talk among Saudis who had traveled to Afghanistan for holy-war training of a big upcoming operation—where and when, nobody knew.

The al-Qaeda videotape, which was widely distributed on the Internet, is a graphic demonstration of how bin Laden and his followers have exploited twenty-first-century communications and weapons technology in the service of the most extreme, retrograde reading of holy war. The result is a fusion I call Holy War, Inc.

No single event better illustrates this fusion than the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Bin Laden’s men, some of whom had trained in the U.S. as pilots, flew passenger jets into two of the world’s most famous buildings in a martyrdom operation that would, in their view, instantly take them to Paradise. They saw themselves as *shuhadaa*—martyrs in the name of Allah—and their attacks as acts of worship.
These were not, however, impoverished suicide bombers of the type seen in the Palestinian intifada. Instead, they were generally well-educated, technically savvy young men who blended all too well into their various American communities in California, Florida, and Virginia. They did not wear the full beards of the typical Islamist militant, but were clean-shaven. They worked out at gyms, ordered in pizza, and booked their flights on the Internet. Some even drank on occasion—a grave sin for a serious Muslim but an excellent cover for bin Laden’s operatives. In short, the hijackers looked and acted like the increasingly diverse United States of the twenty-first century.

This grafting of entirely modern sensibilities and techniques to the most radical interpretation of holy war is the hallmark of bin Laden’s network. One of his Afghan training camps during the late nineties was named al-Badr, after a key seventh-century battle fought by the Prophet Muhammad, yet al-Qaeda members training there were tutored in the use of high-tech explosives such as RDX and C4. Members of al-Qaeda perform bayat, a quasi-mediaeval oath of allegiance to their emir, or leader. But while based in Sudan in the early nineties, they also drew monthly paychecks and supported themselves with a wide range of legitimate businesses. When bin Laden declared war on Americans in 1996, he described U.S. soldiers stationed in the Middle East as “the Crusaders,” as if the crusades of the Middle Ages were still being fought, and signed his declaration “from the peaks of the Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan,” a place barely touched by the modern world. That declaration of war was written on an Apple computer and then faxed or e-mailed to supporters in Pakistan and Britain, who in turn made it available to Arabic newspapers based in London, which subsequently beamed the text, via satellite, to printing centers all over the Middle East and in New York. Thus, a premodern message was delivered by postmodern means.

The head of the secretive U.S. National Security Agency said that bin Laden has better technology for communications than the United States. The Saudi militant’s followers communicate by fax, satellite phone, and e-mail. They encrypt memos on their Macintosh and Toshiba computers. And in the mid-1990s, members of al-Qaeda made a CD-ROM containing hundreds of pages of information about various kinds of weaponry, as well as instructions on how to build
bombs and conduct terrorist and paramilitary operations. Bin Laden’s methods of travel are equally modern: when he lived in Sudan, he generally kept a couple of pilots on call. And when he traveled from Pakistan to Sudan with his family and followers in 1991, they made the trip in his personal jet.\(^7\)

When he first turned his attention to holy war, bin Laden also applied business techniques picked up from his years working for the family company. During the 1980s Afghan war, he set up offices in Pakistan and the United States; raised funds in Saudi Arabia; recruited fighters from every country in the Muslim world; and used the resources of his family company to build bases inside Afghanistan for his holy warriors.

The older generation of Islamist radicals, such as Palestinian Abdullah Azzam, Egypt’s Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, and Yemen’s Sheikh Abdul Majid Zindani studied at Cairo’s al-Azhar University, the Oxford of Islamic learning.\(^8\) By contrast, the men attracted to bin Laden’s standard, like so many of the newer generation of Islamist militants, are more likely to have studied technical subjects such as medicine and engineering, or had careers in business, than to have studied the finer points of Islamic jurisprudence.

So it should not be surprising that bin Laden’s top aide is a physician from an upper-class Egyptian family, or that his former media representative in London was a Saudi entrepreneur, born in Kuwait, who worked in the import-export business. His military adviser in the United States graduated from an Egyptian university with a degree in psychology and worked as a computer network specialist in California.\(^9\) Egyptian militant Rifaa Ahmed Taha, a cosignatory of bin Laden’s 1998 declaration of war against Americans, is an accountant.\(^10\) Another top al-Qaeda official, Mamdouh Mahmud Salim, studied electrical engineering in Iraq.\(^11\) Bin Laden himself studied economics in college and worked for his family’s construction business in Saudi Arabia when he was a young man.\(^12\) During the early 1990s he set himself up as one of the most active businessmen in Sudan.

Indeed, al-Qaeda functions as an interesting analogue of the Saudi Binladin Group, the giant construction company founded by bin Laden’s deeply religious father, which operates in countries across the Middle East and Asia. One of bin Laden’s aliases is simply the Direc-
Indians, Filipinos, Chechens, Uzbekis, Tajiks, Chinese Uighurs, Burmese, Germans, Swedes, French, Arab-Americans, and African-Americans. The graduates of those camps have gone on to export terrorism and holy war to pretty much every corner of the world. As bin Laden himself put it: “I would say that the number of the brothers is large, thank God, and I do not know everyone who is with us in this base or this organization.” Spoken like a true CEO.

Osama bin Laden inspires superlatives, for or against. Shades of gray are rarely applied to any portrait of the world’s most famous Islamist militant. And that makes trying to understand him a complicated task. Testifying before the Senate in 1999, the CIA director, George Tenet, observed that bin Laden “and his global network of lieutenants and associates remain the most immediate and serious threat” of terrorism directed against the United States. That observation would prove to be prescient. Addressing Congress nine days after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, President George W. Bush painted bin Laden as a sort of terrorist godfather when he declared that “al-Qaeda is to terrorism what the Mafia is to crime.”

The headmaster of one of the largest religious schools in Pakistan expressed a rather different view when he said that bin Laden is a “hero because he raised his voice against the outside powers that are trying to crush Muslims.” A small boy carrying a Koran in the remote village in southern Yemen where the bin Laden family originates told me: “We love him. He fights for God’s sake and he is in Afghanistan.” Similar adulation could be heard at a conference I attended in London in the spring of 2000: before an audience of several hundred enthralled men and women, the keynote speaker lauded bin Laden as “this man who sacrificed his life for Islam.”

And so we will encounter several different bin Ladens in the course of this book: bin Laden the hero; bin Laden the über-terrorist; bin Laden the banner carrier of Islamist militancy; perhaps even bin Laden the man.

Further clouding our understanding of bin Laden is the fact that a vast amount has been written about him, a good deal of it rubbish. A database search for news items about bin Laden turns up thousands of
stories. Take the respectable *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, which reported that bin Laden may have obtained an engineering degree in the United States and was financed by the CIA during the 1980s war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Bin Laden has never visited the United States, let alone studied here, and saying the CIA funded him during the Afghan war is a fundamental misunderstanding of the Agency’s operations in Afghanistan.22

Or consider the report by NBC News from December 1998. “U.S. officials” have been told by a “friendly foreign intelligence service” that bin Laden has only “months to live.”23 The story went on to explain that the Saudi exile was suffering from heart problems and possibly cancer. Reports of bin Laden’s imminent demise were plainly exaggerated, as he remains stubbornly alive years later.

These reporting lapses may be explicable by the pressures of daily journalism, but books that have tried to address the bin Laden phenomenon at greater length have often fared no better. One such, *Study of Revenge: Saddam Hussein’s Unfinished War Against America*, argues that Iraq probably sponsored the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. This theory is supported by at least some of the facts. But the writer goes on to suggest that the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 could have been a joint operation between Iraq and bin Laden.24 In the tens of thousands of pages of court filings in the New York trial of four men who conspired to bomb those embassies there is simply no evidence of Iraqi involvement.

Another book, *Dollars for Terror: The United States and Islam*, by the Swiss journalist Richard Labevière, makes a number of bizarre claims about bin Laden: that he is a former CIA agent; that in 1997 he flew into London’s Heathrow airport—unnoticed on his private jet!—to attend a meeting of terrorists planning attacks on tourists in Egypt; and that in Yemen he “controls the principal routes of qat, the hallucinogenic leaf which is consumed in the Horn of Africa and the southern part of the Arabian peninsula.” Perhaps Labevière was chewing qat himself when he wrote this.

Other examples of misinformation about bin Laden can be found in a tome by Yossef Bodansky, who enjoys the title of director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism. In *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*, Bodansky describes the teenage bin Laden
visiting Beirut to drink, womanize, and get involved in bar brawls.\textsuperscript{25} Those who know bin Laden, however, describe a deeply religious teenager who married at the age of seventeen. Perhaps Bodansky confused Osama with one of his twenty or so half-brothers. Bodansky also writes that in 1994 bin Laden traveled to London, where he “settled” in the London suburb of Wembley, a notion that Arab dissidents and journalists living in London find amusing.\textsuperscript{26}

Bodansky makes another fantastic assertion: that the 1996 crash of TWA flight 800 off Long Island, which killed 230 people, was a joint operation between Iran and bin Laden.\textsuperscript{27} However, an exhaustive two-year investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board and the FBI ruled out terrorism in the TWA 800 crash.

Why is there so much unreliable reporting about bin Laden? First, what is written about him is largely uncheckable because he is more or less incommunicado. Second, bin Laden has largely avoided questions about his personal life, and his family has remained determinedly silent, except to issue brief statements distancing themselves from the black sheep of the family. Finally, he is libel proof: one can say pretty much anything about him and know one isn’t going to be sued.

Reporting on bin Laden is also made difficult by the fact that he plays multiple roles. The first is as the leader of a core cadre of hundreds of militants who have sworn an oath of allegiance to him. Another is as the ideologue for a larger group of thousands of holy warriors around the globe who may not be part of his organization, but who look to him for guidance and inspiration. As a result of the U.S. cruise missile attacks directed against bin Laden in August 1998, he has also gained literally millions of admirers who view him as a symbol of resistance to the West. Finally, when announcing those American missile strikes, Clinton administration officials from the president down painted bin Laden as the mastermind of every conceivable terrorist attack in recent memory, a dastardly villain out of a James Bond movie—a portrait that in the light of the events of September 11 may be almost understated.

For his sympathizers, bin Laden has become a turbaned Robin Hood, hiding out not in the forests of Nottingham during the Middle Ages, but in the mountains of almost medieval Afghanistan, gathering around him his band of unmerry men, armed not with crossbows but
with rocket-propelled grenades and C4 explosives, tweaking the noses of the great powers of the West. But bin Laden is perhaps better understood as the Pied Piper of jihad; his invitation to holy war resonates among disaffected and underemployed Muslim youths from Algeria to Pakistan to California, leading them to sacrifice themselves in a conflict that cannot be won in any conventional sense.

What then is the attraction of bin Laden’s call? He espouses a somewhat coherent ideology of anti-Americanism and opposition to Middle Eastern governments he deems “un-Islamic,” and he supports guerrilla movements in countries as diverse as Chechnya and the Philippines. So it is bin Laden’s political ideas as well as the terrorist operations he has mounted that makes understanding him a matter of vital importance.

In an interview a few months before the September 11 attacks, General Pervez Musharaf, the military ruler of Pakistan’s 140 million Muslims, aptly summarized bin Laden’s appeal: “The Western demonization of OBL, as he is known in Pakistan, made him a cult figure among Muslims who resent everything from the decline in moral values as conveyed by Hollywood movies and TV serials to America’s lack of support for Palestinians being killed by Israeli occupation forces, to what Russia is doing to Muslims in Chechnya, [to] what the West did to Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo, [to] India’s oppression of Muslims in Kashmir. . . . It is a very long list of complaints that has generated a strong persecution complex that the OBL cult figure has come to embody. He is a hero figure on the pedestal of Muslim extremism.”

The prototype of the technically savvy, worldly young men who are the shock troops of Holy War, Inc., is Ramzi Yousef, the operational leader of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Yousef, whose family are Baluch Pakistanis, was brought up in Kuwait. He was educated as an electrical engineer in Wales, where he learned excellent English; his terrorism career took him to Afghanistan, New York, Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan. While in Pakistan, Yousef tried to assassinate the country’s first woman prime minister, Benazir Bhutto. Truly, a one-man global jihad.

Yousef was not the typical Islamist militant; he seemed to enjoy the
good life. Yet he plugged into the al-Qaeda network many times during his career as globe-trotting terrorist: training at a bin Laden camp on the Afghan-Pakistan border; working closely with one of bin Laden’s followers in the Philippines; and staying at a bin Laden guesthouse in Pakistan.31

Yousef’s terrorist plots against the West culminated in plans for blowing up a dozen or so American passenger jets, assassinating Pope John Paul II, and crashing a plane into CIA headquarters in Virginia.32 The plots were discovered when Filipino police found their outlines on his laptop computer in his Manila apartment in 1994 and subsequently interrogated one of Yousef’s co-conspirators, who supplied details of the plan the terrorists code-named Bojinka.33

When Yousef was finally captured in 1995, in Pakistan, FBI agents flew him back to New York. The helicopter that would take Yousef to his American jail cell in Manhattan flew past the World Trade Center, and one of the agents commented that the towers were still standing. “They wouldn’t be if I had enough money and explosives,” came the reply.34

Al-Qaeda would have more money and more time, and the September 11 plotters, who began arriving in the United States as early as 1994, would execute a breathtakingly ambitious plan—one that combined, in effect, the most spectacular elements of the 1993 World Trade Center attack with the Bojinka plot.

Mohamed Atta, an Egyptian who was one of the cell leaders of the World Trade Center operation, embodies the marriage of religious zeal and technical accomplishment typical of al-Qaeda’s elite recruits. Atta was born in 1968 to a religious, middle-class family in Cairo.35 In 1992, he moved to Germany, where he studied urban planning and preservation at Hamburg’s Technical Institute. Living the life of a semipermanent student, he took seven years to graduate. One of his professors, Dittmar Machule, remembers Atta as a precise thinker who was skeptical of the Western world; he never drank alcohol or had relationships with women. Atta’s religiosity led him to found an Islamic student group at the university. Its fifty members included two of his roommates, who would join the Trade Center conspiracy.

On May 18, 2000, Atta applied for an American visa at the U.S. embassy in Berlin. He took a circuitous route to the United States, travel-
ing via Prague, where he met with an Iraqi intelligence agent—an encounter that might or might not be significant, since one meeting does not an al-Qaeda-Iraqi conspiracy make. A senior U.S. counterterrorism official insisted to me that “no one has drawn any conclusion of any sort about that meeting.”

Atta left Prague for Newark on June 3. One of his first stops was a flight school in the university town of Norman, Oklahoma—the same place where one of al-Qaeda’s American recruits, Ihab Ali, had learned to fly in the early nineties before going on to serve as one of bin Laden’s pilots in Sudan.

After a few weeks, Atta moved to Venice, Florida, where he took up flying at Huffman Aviation between July and November. He paid $25,000 for his lessons and was subsequently certified to fly single-engine and multi-engine planes. In December, Atta spent several hours at another flight school, where he practiced on its Boeing 727 simulator. The instructor was puzzled by the fact that, unlike other pupils, who were interested in the arts of taking off and landing, Atta wanted only to practice turns. While he was living in the United States, he was wired as much as $100,000 from Pakistan—money that he distributed to other plotters and that may have paid for his flying lessons.

In February 2001 Atta visited the tiny airport at Belle Glade, Florida, where he made inquiries about how far the crop-dusting planes could fly and the volume of poisons they could carry. One nightmare scenario of counterterrorism planners involves crop dusters modified to disperse chemical or biological agents over a major American city. Atta and his confederates clearly were interested in exploring that possibility. In a remarkable act of chutzpah, they even made inquiries about securing a loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to finance the purchase of a crop duster.

On August 28, Atta bought a ticket for American Airlines flight 11 from Boston to Los Angeles. A week or so later he and one of his Hamburg friends went drinking at a bar in Hollywood, Florida—a puzzling aspect of the story, since Atta had shunned alcohol for years. Four days later, early on the morning of September 11, an airport security camera captured him entering the departure area for a flight from Portland, Maine, to Boston, where he connected with flight 11.

In Atta’s bags, which never made it onto that flight, investigators
found a five-page document in Arabic that contained instructions for Atta’s final moments on earth. Under a section headed “When you enter the plane” the document exhorted its reader to pray: “Oh God. Open all doors to me. Oh God who answers prayers and answers those who ask you for your help, I am asking you for forgiveness. I am asking you to lighten the way. I am asking you to lift the burden I feel.”

Exactly one hour after takeoff, Mohamed Atta guided American flight 11 into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The former student of urban preservation had now become the architect of the most spectacular act of urban demolition in history.

Of course, bin Laden is hardly the only Islamist militant who has espoused opposition to the United States and to Middle Eastern governments that are “un-Islamic,” but he is now the focus of those ideas. Moreover, bin Laden is a quite different figure from the Arab terrorists of the seventies and eighties, none of whom enjoyed his worldwide celebrity, or espoused an overarching and coherent philosophy that went beyond opposition to Israel and calls for a Palestinian state. Bin Laden articulates an all-encompassing worldview with a much wider appeal than simple hatred of Israel. Of course, he is opposed to Israel, but he also calls for the end of U.S. military actions against Iraq; demands the creation of a “Muslim” nuclear weapon; claims it is a religious obligation to attack American military and civilian targets worldwide because of the continued presence of U.S. troops in the Gulf; criticizes the governments of countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia for not instituting what he sees as true Islamic law; and supports a multitude of holy wars around the globe.

Most important, while the state-sponsored Arab terrorist groups of the 1980s are now largely out of business, bin Laden’s al-Qaeda and its affiliates are constantly planning new operations. And the success of the September 11 attacks will only embolden the already confident bin Laden, who will see that success as a sign of Allah’s favor.

Then there is the ripple effect. In an increasingly globalized culture, bin Laden’s ideas are influencing the beliefs and actions of militants from Yemen to Kenya to England. In part, this is simply a matter of timing: in the twenty-first century communication is ever easier and
bin Laden’s message can spread with a speed and reach unimaginable two decades ago. Bin Laden’s interviews with CNN, *Time*, and *Newsweek* circulated internationally. Arab media outlets such as Qatar’s al-Jazeera television and London’s *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* newspaper relay news about bin Laden all over the Middle East. That coverage is in turn picked up by Western television networks and wire services.

The Internet has had as great an impact on Holy War, Inc. as it has on many other concerns. The recruitment videotape made by al-Qaeda in 2001 was converted to DVD format, which makes it easy to copy by computer, and was made available in several chatrooms. There are also Web sites devoted to bin Laden and jihadist sites, such as the London-based azzam.com (which has been difficult to access since the September 11 attacks), which deliver a wide range of products and services. Azzam.com details the lives of holy warriors martyred in conflicts around the world, sells videotapes of those wars, carries interviews with jihadist leaders, and sells books by the leading ideologues of jihad. A measure of the site’s global reach can be seen in the reaction to the death of a Saudi named Khalid al-Madani, who was killed in Chechnya in February 2000 while fighting under the command of a bin Laden protégé. In the course of one day, messages of support for al-Madani’s family poured in from South Africa, the United States, Lebanon, Malaysia, Canada, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Sri Lanka, and India. The Middle Eastern terrorist groups of the 1970s and 1980s needed the patronage of states to supply the money and infrastructure that allowed them to do business. (The archetype of that model was the Abu Nidal Organization, whose serial assassinations and hijackings were sponsored first by Iraq in the 1970s, then by Syria and Libya during the 1980s.) Bin Laden, however, is an individual with deep enough pockets to operate largely without sponsorship, while a rapidly globalizing world, propelled by new technologies, allows his message to be taken up with a click of a mouse by holy warriors from Azerbaijan to Yemen. Holy War, Inc., thus represents a privatization of terrorism that parallels the movement by many countries in the past decade to convert their state-supported industries to privately held companies. Nothing better underlines this development than the contrast be-
between the American bombing of Libyan targets in 1986, for that government's role in the killing of U.S. soldiers based in Germany, with the U.S. Navy's cruise missile attacks, in 1998, on bin Laden, an individual, for his role in the African embassy bombings.

Bin Laden's message also differs qualitatively from the slogans of earlier Arab militants, who were focused on the more strictly political goals of pan-Arabism or the creation of a Palestinian state. Bin Laden is truly conducting a religious war, his actions sanctified by ulema, or clergy, and he has wholeheartedly embraced the most extreme reading of jihad, not only against the infidel West, but also against every "apostate" regime in the Middle East, and countries like India or Russia that oppress Muslims.

The wider Islamist militant movements that look to bin Laden for inspiration also follow the Holy War, Inc., paradigm. The men who lead these movements are generally well-educated and utilize the latest in technology in their various jihads.

In 1999 I visited Abdullah Muntazir, the spokesman for Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba, the largest Kashmiri militant organization, founded in 1985 as an Afghan jihad group. Dressed in shalwar kameez shirt and pants—and a jean jacket—Muntazir, who studied mathematics in college and guerrilla tactics in Afghanistan, was a walking embodiment of both the East and West. It was Ramadan and he was fasting, but he nonetheless offered me a drink of tea. The organization's small office in Islamabad, was packed with fax machines and computers. Muntazir had just been checking out a Web site maintained by Chechen rebels for whom Lashkar helps raise money for their war against the Russians. "This technology is a good thing," Muntazir explained with a wave of his hand, "but we reject the civilization of the West."

The Holy War, Inc., phenomenon is also exemplified by the Islamic Army of Aden, an affiliate of al-Qaeda that is based in southern Yemen and that kidnapped a group of Western tourists in December 1998. The kidnappers equipped themselves with a satellite phone. Their media representative is Abu Hamza, an Egyptian engineer, now a British citizen, who maintains an extensive Web site where militants swap tips about how to get jihad training and post bank account numbers for terrorist groups.

The Algerian Armed Islamic Group, known by its French initials,
GIA, maintains close ties to al-Qaeda, and shows the global reach of Holy War, Inc. During the past decade GIA operated on four continents. Members of the group robbed banks in Belgium, organized cells in Canada and London, bombed a subway station in Paris, set up a passport-forging operation in Europe, tried to bomb Los Angeles International Airport, trained at bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan, fought in Bosnia, and murdered countless civilians in their own country.48

The transnational character of Holy War, Inc., and its embrace of Western technologies, can also be seen in the wars that have racked Chechnya, in southern Russia, since 1994. One of the key leaders of the Chechen resistance is a Saudi known as Khattab. Khattab fought in Afghanistan under bin Laden before moving to Chechnya, where he helped launch the second Chechen war in 1999. On the Internet, Chechen groups maintain Web sites in more than a dozen languages, from Albanian to Swedish.49 The al-Qaeda recruitment videotape, accessible on the Web in Real Player format, lauds Khattab's exploits. Chechens hone their battle skills in Afghan training camps, and graduates of Pakistan's religious schools fight alongside the rebels in Chechnya.50

While the foot soldiers of Holy War, Inc. have now gone global, dispersed in dozens of countries around the world, the ideological roots and formative experiences of those holy warriors can generally be found in one place, Afghanistan, to which many of them were drawn during the Soviet-Afghan war. Like thousands of his followers, Osama bin Laden would leave the comforts of his home on the Arabian peninsula for the dangers of the Afghan holy war, and from the crucible of that conflict he would emerge steeled as a holy warrior. It is to the biography of the chief executive officer of Holy War, Inc., that we will turn now.