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**OSAMA BIN LADEN**

On May 1, 2011, American soldiers killed al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden at his compound near Islamabad, Pakistan. Intelligence officials believe bin Laden was responsible for many deadly acts of terrorism, including the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. He had been on the FBI’s “most wanted” list for more than a decade.

EARLY LIFE

Osama bin Laden was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 1957 or 1958. He was the 17th of 52 children born to Mohammed bin Laden, a Yemeni immigrant who owned the largest construction company in the Saudi kingdom. Young Osama had a privileged, cosseted upbringing. His siblings were educated in the West and went to work for his father’s company (by then an enormous conglomerate that distributed consumer goods like Volkswagen cars and Snapple beverages across the Middle East), but Osama bin Laden stayed close to home. He went to school in Jiddah, married young and, like many Saudi men, joined the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

THE PAN-ISLAMIST IDEA

For bin Laden, Islam was more than just a religion: It shaped his political beliefs and influenced every decision he made. While he was at college in the late 1970s, he became a follower of the radical pan-Islamist scholar Abdullah Azzam, who believed that all Muslims should rise up in jihad, or holy war, to create a single Islamic state. This idea appealed to the young bin Laden, who resented what he saw as a growing Western influence on Middle Eastern life.

In 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan; soon afterward, Azzam and bin Laden traveled to Peshawar, a Pakistani city on the border with Afghanistan, to join the resistance. They did not become fighters themselves, but they used their extensive connections to win financial and moral support for the mujahideen (the Afghan rebels). They also encouraged young men to come from all over the Middle East to be a part of the Afghan jihad. Their organization, called the Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK) served as a global recruitment network–it had offices in places as far away as Brooklyn and Tucson, Arizona–and provided the migrant soldiers, known as “Afghan Arabs,” with training and supplies. Most important, it showed bin Laden and his associates that it was possible to put pan-Islamism into practice.

In 1988, bin Laden created a new group, called al-Qaida (“the base”) that would focus on symbolic acts of terrorism instead of military campaigns. After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia to step up fundraising for this new and more complicated mission. However, the comparatively pro-Western Saudi royal family feared that bin Laden’s fiery pan-Islamist rhetoric might cause trouble in the kingdom, and so they tried to keep him as quiet as they could. They took away his passport and spurned his offer to send “Afghan Arabs” to guard the border after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Then, adding insult to injury, they sought help from the “infidel” U.S. instead. Furious about being snubbed, bin Laden vowed that it was al-Qaida, and not the Americans, who would one day prove to be “master of this world.”

Early the next year, bin Laden left Saudi Arabia for the more militantly Islamist Sudan. After one more year of preparation, al- Qaida struck for the first time: A bomb exploded in a hotel in Aden, Yemen, that had housed American troops on their way to a peacekeeping mission in Somalia. (No Americans died in the blast, but two Austrian tourists did.)

WORLDWIDE JIHAD Emboldened, bin Laden and his associates embraced violent jihad in earnest. For example, they trained and armed the Somali rebels who killed 18 American servicemen in Mogadishu in 1993. They were also linked to the 1993 bombing of New York’s World Trade Center; the attempted assassination of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarek in 1995; the bombing of a U.S. National Guard training center in Riyadh that same year; and the truck bomb that destroyed the Khobar Towers, an American military residence in Dharan, in 1996.

“PUBLIC ENEMY #1”

In an attempt to protect himself from arrest and win even more recruits to al-Qaida’s deadly cause, bin Laden moved from Sudan to Afghanistan in 1996. Meanwhile, the scale of al-Qaida’s attacks continued to increase. On August 7, 1998, bombs exploded simultaneously at the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, where 213 people were killed and 4,500 were injured, and Dar-es- Salaam, Tanzania, where 11 people were killed and 85 were injured. Al-Qaida took credit for the bombings. Then, on October 12, 2000, a small boat loaded with explosives plowed into the hull of the U.S.S. Cole, an American naval destroyer docked off the coast of Yemen. 17 sailors were killed and 38 were injured. Bin Laden took credit for that incident as well.

A federal grand jury in the United States indicted bin Laden on charges related to the embassy bombings, but with no defendant there could be no trial. Meanwhile, al-Qaida operatives were busy planning the biggest attack of all: the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Even in the frenzy of the post-September 11 “global war on terror,” bin Laden eluded capture. For almost ten years, he remained in hiding, issuing fatwas and taunts over radio and television, recruiting enthusiastic young jihadis to his cause and plotting new attacks. Meanwhile, the CIA and other intelligence officials searched in vain for his hiding place.

Finally, in August 2010, they traced bin Laden to a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, about 35 miles from Islamabad. For months, CIA agents watched the house while drones photographed it from the sky. Finally, it was time to move. On May 2, 2011 (May 1 in the United States), a team of Navy SEALs burst into the compound. They found the al-Qaida leader in an upstairs bedroom with a pistol and an assault rifle nearby and shot him in the head and chest, killing him instantly. “Justice,” said President Obama in a televised address to the nation that night, “has been done.”

*DID YOU KNOW? Bin Laden’s body was evacuated from the Abbottabad compound by helicopter and flown to an American aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean. The corpse was buried at sea.*