

Book Provides Additional Insight into Bin Laden's Past

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER YOUSSEF ABOUL-ENEIN, USN

In an effort to make readers aware of street literature and Arabic books about Usama Bin Laden, *Infantry Magazine* is featuring a third in a series of review essays that will introduce American military readers to unique perspectives and information on Bin Laden. The Al-Qaeda leader and the movement he has created are much too important to ignore what is written about him both in Arabic print and on the internet.

This third essay will explore the work of Khalid Khaleel Asaad who in 2000 published *Muqatil Min Makkah: Al-Qissa Al-Kamila lee Usama Bin Laden (Warrior from Mecca: The Complete Story of Usama Bin Laden)*. This book is a 388-page expose on the myriad of connections Bin Laden has had with Afghan *Mujahideen* commanders, Sudanese government officials, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and much more. The title is a misnomer, as it is not entirely a complete biography, but it does contain a better picture of Bin Laden's early involvement with the Soviet-Afghan War and less information about the battles in which he participated, like the Defense of Jaji and the Battle of Jalalabad. What it does offer is some insight into Usama Bin Laden as a planner, organizer, political operator, and perhaps one of the better discussions on his closeness to the Sudanese government.

This is the author's third book on Bin Laden, with a 1991 book on Usama Bin Laden in Saudi Arabia and a 1994 biography of Usama Bin Laden's father, Mohammed Bin Laden, both written in Arabic. There is no biography on Asaad, but he seems to be an investigative journalist and independent writer. His 2000 book, which is the subject of this review, was published by *Al-Alam lil Nahsir Publishers* out of London, a place whose liberal asylum laws has made it a haven for Islamist militant rejectionists until the recent wave of attacks on the London transportation system. This review essay demonstrates that jihadist literature and biographies of major Islamist militant figures can be found not only on Arab street corners but a few blocks from a London pub as well.

Bin Laden's Gradual Involvement in the Soviet-Afghan War (1980-1985)

This particular book discusses the gradual involvement of Usama Bin Laden in the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. Bin Laden's odyssey began 17 days after the Soviet invasion on Christmas Day 1979. This places Bin Laden's first foray seeking out what he could do for the jihad in mid-January 1980; he was 21 years old. His first actions were not in Afghanistan but in Pakistan, where he donated \$3 million to Pakistani Islamist organization *Jamiat-e-Islami (The Islamic Group)* to be distributed



Courtesy photo

Ayman Al Zawahiri and Usama Bin Laden

to Afghan *mujahideen* (jihadists, but at the time, during the Cold War, American officials would have considered them freedom fighters). Between 1980 and 1983, Bin Laden made frequent trips between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, looking for ways to contribute directly to Afghan fighters. In 1983, he arrived in the Pakistan frontier town of Peshawar on the Afghan border and donated \$5 million to Afghan *mujahideen* groups. During this period he invested another \$5 million to create a pipeline for young Arabs to volunteer for the Soviet-Afghan War. The book outlines several pipelines:

(1) The Bin Laden Foundation and Construction Company in Cairo, Egypt, used its experience of moving a massive amount of Egyptian laborers to work in Saudi Arabia to export Egyptian jihadists to Pakistan and then onto Afghanistan. They would arrive first in Jeddah, stay at a transit house called *Bait Al-Ansar* (House of Volunteers), and await further transfer to Peshawar. Bin Laden at this stage had direct control of this pipeline and not the other two.

(2) The World Muslim League at the time maintained 1,112 offices and projects worldwide. During the start of the Soviet-Afghan War, they began with humanitarian work, creating 15 clinics in Peshawar for Afghan refugees and facilitated in bringing 900 Arabs (300 of whom were Egyptian) into Afghanistan including Mohammed Shawky Islambooli, older brother of President Anwar Sadat's assassin Khalid Islambooli. The World Muslim League, an arm of the Saudi government, provided \$180 payments for volunteers, processed passports, and typically kept the Arab volunteers in Jeddah for two weeks

before sending them on to Pakistan.

(3) The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood advertised and raised funds for the Soviet-Afghan War. They created pipelines as well for those wanting to participate physically in the jihad against the Soviets. Their primary source of recruitment was Egyptian university campuses. The Muslim Brotherhood drives became a distinct counterculture and a jihadist revival that swept up hundreds of students. The book also highlights how clerics in Egypt began weaving the name of Usama Bin Laden as a leader and organizer of jihad in Afghanistan.

It is important to pause and realize that these pipelines to Afghan jihad were not separate and distinct, but complemented one another in bringing Arabs to the front in the fight against Russian forces. Arab security and intelligence agencies, which had battled jihadists aggressively since the 1967 Six-Day War, saw in these pipelines the opportunity to rid themselves of Islamist militants with the hope that they would not return from fighting the modern forces of the Soviet 40th Army. Waiting for these Arabs were representatives of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam and Usama Bin Laden. Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, who was killed in a 1989 car bomb in Peshawar, established *Maktab Al-Khidmat lil Mujahideen* (The Services Office for Arab Fighters, *Maktab Al-Khidmat* for short), the first establishment to undertake the organization, reception, and orientation of these young Arabs. Known as the fighting cleric, he also brought Sunni Islamist militant groups to the United States in the mid to late eighties, and as Bin Laden's former professor at King Abdul-Aziz University, served as his mentor. *Maktab Al-Khidmat* would be the template Bin Laden would use to establish Al-Qaeda. Bin Laden brought organizational as well as administrative skills, fundraising, and military talent to the organization. Due to numerous complaints of the inefficiency of *Maktab Al-Khidmat*, Bin Laden organized it with:

□ *A military committee* that oversaw military training and

conducted topographical studies of Afghan terrain, as well as escape routes along the Afghan-Pakistan border;

□ *An Administrative Committee* that was responsible for the clothing, feeding, and lodging of Arab-Afghans; and

□ *A Travel Committee* that arranged visas, flights, and caravan routes from Cairo to Jeddah, on to Peshawar, then finally to Afghanistan, and back. They also perfected medical evacuations of wounded *mujahideen*, both Arab and non-Arab, to major treatment facilities in Saudi Arabia.

Bin Laden Settles in Pakistan and Afghanistan (1985-1989)

Usama Bin Laden would use his experiences of organizing Sheikh Azzam's offices for Arab jihadists to not only become a major executive of this organization, but also to form his own stand-alone training camps in 1985 called *Massadah Al-Ansar* (Lion's Den of Companions). These camps were located in the Afghan mountain region of Jaji near the southeastern border of Afghanistan close to the Pakistan border (Read the *Infantry Magazine's* July-August 2006 article "Street Literature on Usama Bin Laden Part II: The Soviet-Afghan War Years A Review of a 1991 Street

Autobiography of Bin Laden," for details on Bin Laden's establishment of *Massadah Al-Ansar* and the Battles of Jaji and Jalalabad). What is not clear in many Arabic accounts about Bin Laden is when he ventured out on his own away from his mentor and spiritual professor Abdullah Azzam, and if Azzam objected to Bin Laden establishing his own camp. What is clear after 1985, is that Bin Laden remained in Pakistan and Afghanistan on a more permanent basis. He initially focused his efforts on building *Massadah al-Ansar* and recruiting Arab, Asian, and African fighters to this unit. After participating in the defense of Jaji from Soviet assault in 1986 and then the Battle of Jalalabad in 1987, he returned briefly to Saudi Arabia to conduct fundraising. Bin Laden's effort at creating *Massadah Al-Ansar* is a clear indication of his desire to elevate Arab support from financial and logistical to direct combat.

The book devotes a chapter to Bin Laden and his fighting of the Soviets. Although it lacks tactical detail, the book does show how the introduction of more modern weapons increased the lethality of the Afghan *mujahideen* fighters and exponentially raised the potency of Afghan



insurgency tactics against the Soviets. As an example, the book cites how when AK-47 assault rifles and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) were made more available to the Afghans the morale, quality, and quantity of attacks on Soviet forces increased. When provided SAM-7 anti-air shoulder-fired missiles, this elevated their confidence and tactical options. From 1979 to 1984, the bulk of modern weapons fielded by Afghans fighting the Soviets were either captured or stolen with the complicit cooperation of Afghan communist regulars who deserted to the Afghan *mujahideen* factions. The book cites the 1982 Soviet military operation in the Panshir Valley when the Russians, as if on parade, demonstrated their armored might to frighten the Afghan fighters. This only stiffened Afghan resolve and led them to assess the Russian formation for lethal hit-and-run targets of opportunity. Soviet infantry carried anti-tank weapons when the Afghan *mujahideen* had no tanks. The book contains a unique chapter dealing with Bin Laden's arrangements to import weapons from China into Afghanistan. These weapons included Kalashnikov assault rifles, RPGs, 82mm anti-tank guns, 12.7mm machine guns, 14.5mm anti-air guns, 81mm artillery guns, 107mm rockets, and BM-12 rockets

Another military deal mentioned in the book is Bin Laden's arrangement to import surplus Syrian military uniforms and equipment into Afghanistan, a connection he would use later to provide uniforms to the Sudanese Army. This makes sense as Bin Laden's mother and first wife come from a prominent Syrian family. This combination of fundraising, engineering capability and ability to access military equipment and bulk supplies on the world market in addition to his fighting experience, organizational skill and leadership is unique and demonstrates that should Osama Bin Laden be neutralized it will be highly difficult to find anyone in Al-Qaeda with such diverse talents and cultivated connections.

Evolution of the Radicalist Afghan Mujahideen Factions

The book traces the ideological foundations of the *mujahideen* factions that fought the Soviet Union and benefited most from Arab and Pakistani support to those Afghan leaders who espoused the jihadist gospel of Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966). Among the early jihadist Afghan leaders and spiritual founders of many of the more violent of the dozen *mujahideen* factions was Afghan Sheikh Ghulam Mohammed Niazi, who would later rise to be Dean of Islamic Jurisprudence at Kabul University. Niazi received his Islamic training at Egypt's Al-Azhar University and became closely linked with the Islamist politics of the Muslim Brotherhood during its repression under Egyptian strongman Gamal Abdel-Nasser. Niazi returned to Afghanistan in the late '60s and his hard-line Islamist worldview stimulated professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, as well as students Abdul-Rab Al-Rassul Sayyaf and Gulbuddin Hekmetyar. These students demonstrated against the Afghan monarchy of Zahir Shah in 1972, calling for the establishment of an Islamic state. In 1969, the four formed an organization at the university *Jamiat-e-Islami*, in which Professor Rabbani was head, Sayyaf his deputy, Hekmetyar his operations chief, and Niazi the overall spiritual advisor. They would serve as a bulwark against pro-communist student unions; even

Hekmetyar would spend time in jail, on the charge of murdering a known communist student leader. Hekmetyar would not last long in Afghanistan, beginning his political career with the murder of a Communist student leader Saidal Sokhandan in 1972. *Jamiat* was violently anti-secular but it is within these student groups that the *Jamiat-e-Islami* led by Rabbani and *Hizb-e-Islami* (The Islamic Party) led by Hekmetyar in exile in Pakistan were born. These two organizations would become the most violent and intolerant of the dozen *mujahideen* factions fighting the Soviets and would receive the lion's share of support from Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence Department (ISI). Today, Hekmetyar is among those wanted by the United States; he currently lives in Iran, skirting the Iranian and Afghan border.

These groups of mainly Pashtun tribesmen married up with their Pakistani counterparts and shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would call a significant meeting of all like-minded student groups in Peshawar to declare a formal jihad against the Soviet Union. Among the items on the agenda for discussion was Rabbani arguing the futility of direct combat against Soviet forces, and Hekmetyar pushing for a suicidal jihadist commitment as the only remedy to free Afghanistan from the Soviets.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and the Soviet-Afghan War

During the Soviet-Afghan War, the book discusses the closeness by which Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood was involved with jihadists. It is important to realize the times, and the United States as well as Arab allies caught in the grip of the Cold War did not object to violent extremists directing their anger and jihad against the Soviet army. Deputy *Murshid* (Supreme Guide) Omar Tilmissany was given a full-honor reception by Pakistan's dictator Zia-ul-Haq, who was convening a major convention of the Afghan Jihad Commanders within a year of the Soviet invasion. The Muslim Brotherhood established offices for donations and recruitments not only all over Egypt, but also in Kuwait and Peshawar. The Islamic Medical Union in Egypt recruited doctors to serve in the jihad and conducted massive humanitarian drives for the Afghans. The Afghan jihad commander Sayyaf was a key speaker in the 1986 convention of the Islamic Medical Union in Egypt. Islamist radical educators led by the Muslim Brotherhood penetrated schools in Afghan refugees centers in Pakistan infusing children with a politicized Islamist world view and new recruits for the Afghan *mujahideen* factions. The book alleges that the Muslim Brotherhood with funding from Osama Bin Laden opened an Islamic College of Jurisprudence in 1985. This was a time in which Bin Laden created *Massadah Al-Ansar* and had 280 fighters under his own command called the *khurasa* (silent) brigade, his fighters were divided into two groups: an assault group led by Mohammed Islambooli (brother of Anwar Sadat's assassin) and a support group. The support group's tasking was to defend *Massadah Al-Ansar*, fire mortars, and man anti-air weapons and artillery. The support group were given training in on surface-to-surface missiles, this group was led by Ahmed Attiyah Zahrani.

The first assault led by Bin Laden in 1986 and witnessed by Sayyaf saw his group decimated by overwhelming Soviet and Afghan communist firepower. This led Sayyaf to comment that

Arabs did not make worthy fighters. Bin Laden licked his wounds, recruited and developed his network of caves at *Massadah Al-Ansar* in the mountain region of Jaji.

KHAD (Communist Afghan Intelligence) Tactics

Khedamat-e Etelea'at-e Dawlati (KHAD) was the feared Afghan Intelligence apparatus modeled on the Soviet KGB and in the service of the Soviet intelligence and the Afghan Communist regime. KHAD existed from 1978 to 1992 and the book highlights a few of its tactics against Afghan Islamist fighters that included:

- Co-opting an Egyptian cleric of Al-Azhar University, Abdel-Rahman Al-Najar, to conduct an official visit to Afghanistan and declare the mujahideen a group of highway bandits.

- KHAD operatives spreading into Afghan refugee camps in order to spread disinformation with the objective of stimulating tribal warfare.

- Assassination attempts on key jihadist figures like Rabbani, Sayyaf and Hekmetyar (all three were close to Usama Bin Laden).

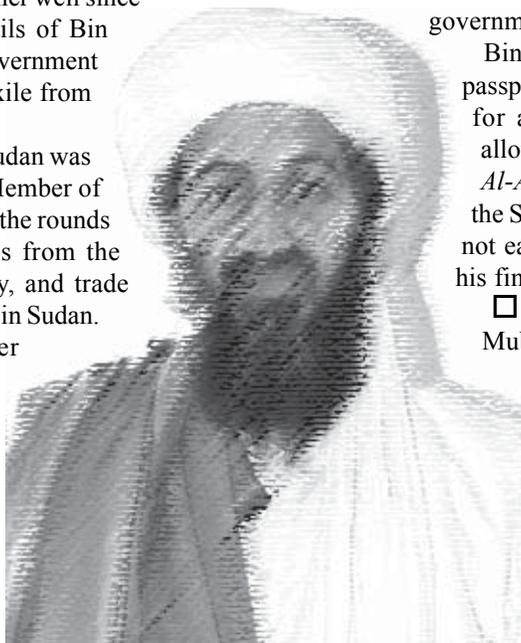
- Characterizing the mujahideen factions as bandits, highwaymen and drug dealers not interested in state policy but enriching themselves.

These techniques seemed to cause the jihadist fighters and their leaders the most consternation, according to the book which devotes considerable pages to these four KHAD counterinsurgency operations.

Bin Laden's Sudan Years (1991-1996)

Sheikh Hassan Al-Turabi is an eloquent Sorbonne-educated lawyer and cleric who is fluent in English, French, and Arabic. He is also a founding member of Sudan's National Islamic Front (NIF) and a key advocate of establishing an Islamist state in Sudan. Turabi in collaboration with a cadre of army officers, among them General Omar Bashir, sought to rule Sudan on an Islamist model, after deposing the long-reigning dictator General Jafar Numeiri and creating ideal conditions for Islamist militant terror to thrive. Turabi and Bin Laden have known each other well since 1982, and the book offers amazing details of Bin Laden's relationship with the Sudanese government during his five years in Sudan after his exile from Saudi Arabia.

Bin Laden's first order of business in Sudan was to pay \$5,000 to become a Consultative Member of the National Islamic Front. He then made the rounds of Sudanese ministries, visiting officials from the ministries of health, agriculture, industry, and trade to assess the variety of investment projects in Sudan. Bin Laden also married Turabi's sister Maha, and through his connections with him that stretch back to 1982 was granted access to all Sudanese government officials and business elite. Bin Laden was given an exemption from import duties and he imported \$35 million in German construction equipment, with an eye to construct bridges, roads and housing. He made a



\$10 million contribution to an Arab-Afghan relief fund in Sudan designed to resettle those jihadists who fought in the Soviet-Afghan War and could not return to their respective Arab countries. The book states that he created a total of 23 military training camps in Sudan, judging from his extensive land holdings this number of camps is within the realm of the possible. The book also postulates that Bin Laden sought out projects that Arab governments left uncompleted and sought to finish the job himself as a means of garnering popular support from the people and government. Projects left uncompleted by Arab governments include:

- King Fahd Road linking Port Sudan and Khartoum. Bin Laden completed the 700 kilometer road and renamed the *Tahedi* (Challenge) Road.

- Port Sudan Airport was a joint project in which the Saudi government and Bin Laden competed to take credit (Bin Laden provided \$30 million in financing and sustainment costs for the airport).

- Mosque left unfinished by the Kuwaiti government in Juba, extreme Southern tip of Sudan that is a transportation hub for Nile traffic going to Uganda, Kenya and the Congo (formerly Zaire) was finished by Bin Laden.

Bin Laden spent and lost a fortune in Sudan. The book discusses the following transactions, with Bin Laden evolving into an emergency bank fund for the sanctioned Sudanese government:

- Completing the Atbara-Khartoum Road (500 kilometers).
- Opening Al-Shamal Bank with \$50 million in return for 1 million acres of land in Korfodan in the south and western Sudan (Darfur).

- \$80 million desperately needed by Sudanese leader Omar Bashir to import wheat and avert food riots.

- Hospitals, daycares, eldercare, a stadium.

- Financial guarantor of an arms deal between the cash strapped Sudan and Iran.

- Imported Syrian army surplus uniforms and field equipment for the Sudanese Army.

- Paid for oil on behalf of the Sudanese government.

Bin Laden was offered a Sudanese diplomatic passport, and Sudan's policy of requiring no visas for anyone coming from a Muslim country allowed him to bring remnants of his *Massadah Al-Ansar* group to Sudan. What finally led to the Sudanese expulsion of Bin Laden, which was not easy for Khartoum that had come to rely on his financial leverage, were several factors:

- Attempted assassination of President Mubarak of Egypt in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia strained relations between Sudan and its powerful neighbor to the north.

- U.S. pressure on the Sudanese to exile or bring to justice Bin Laden as more and more terror attacks were linked to him and his group.

- Saudi pressure as Bin Laden was issuing threats on the life and person of King Fahd from Sudan.

□ Bin Laden was running weapons from Sudan to Egypt via the camel caravan routes and providing them to Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Egyptian Islamic Group in Aswan which then distributed them throughout Egypt.

Conclusion

The book continues with Bin Laden and the Taliban, which is poorly written and not as detailed as his previous years in Afghanistan. The author seems obsessed with the conspiracy theory that Bin Laden was supported and encouraged by the CIA and then turned on them when he felt abandoned by the agency. There is no sourcing in this book or basis to back up this assertion; common wisdom is that the CIA operated via the Pakistani ISI (intelligence) which doled out material and financial support to the Afghan fighters, favoring the more militant Hekmetyar, Rabbani and Sayyaf triumvirate.

What can be learned from this Arabic biography?

(1) Bin Laden's gradual ascent to his current position as leader of Al-Qaeda includes going through initial failures and learning from his mistakes.

(2) Bin Laden, although he surrounds himself with older mentors through the years (Zawahiri, Turabi, Atef and Azzam) is influenced by them, but he does have his own strategic and tactical vision such as leaving Azzam's group to venture on his own in creating an Arab fighting force to combat the Soviets in Afghanistan.

(3) Wherever Bin Laden may be hiding, look to the lessons learned from his Sudanese odyssey, and rest assured he has the loyalty of his protectors cemented by marriage, money and tribal connections. It was not easy for Sudan to rid themselves of Bin Laden and it was also not easy for Taliban leader Mullah Omar to give him up after 9-11.

(4) Pay close attention to the many ways in which Arab fighters were exported to Afghanistan. Many were brought in using the efficient processing methods of importing laborers from third world

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countries to the Gulf. The pipeline was diverted to Afghanistan and instead of laborers; jihadists were given a chance to travel to Afghanistan.

(5) Running as independents, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood captured 88 seats in Egypt's 454 seat parliament in 2005; we ignore the history of

this organization at our own peril. Note the capabilities highlighted in the book the Muslim Brotherhood brought to the Soviet-Afghan War and their ability to turn militant should the need arise. They cannot be allowed to politically participate in Arab governments, while expressing their approval of violence as a means of political expression.

Books like Asaad's must be assessed, analyzed and debated, with efforts to highlight Arab views and perspectives about America's main adversaries. American military planners must begin to enter the decision-cycle of our enemies and reading and highlighting excerpts from Arabic biographies of jihadists allows for the acquisition of the vocabulary, personalities and places inherent in the jihadist movement. Much like America's obsession with Russian military doctrine and policies during the Cold War, this conflict will require the same focus on Arabic books by allies who fight jihadists, adversaries who support jihadists, and the enemy — the jihadists themselves.

Lieutenant Commander Yousef Aboul-Enein is a Navy Medical Service Corps officer who has been on special detail in the Washington, D.C., area. From 2002 to 2006 he was Middle East Policy Advisor at the Office of the Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. He currently serves as a Counterterrorism Analyst. He wishes to thank PS1(SW/AW) David Tranberg, USN, who is an undergraduate at the University of Maryland University College for his valuable comments and edits to this review essay. The author also wishes to thank the John T. Hughes Library and the University of Pennsylvania Library for making this Arabic biography of Bin Laden available for study and analysis.

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Please contact us with any questions or concerns.

E-mail — michelle.rowan@us.army.mil

Telephone — (706) 545-2350/6951 or DSN 835-2350/6951

Mail — INFANTRY Magazine, P.O. Box 52005, Fort Benning, GA 31905