

## **Al-Qaeda's Second Fatwa**

In Al-Qaeda's Second Fatwa, authorized by Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, there are broad calls for jihad against the West, specifically the United States. Advocating to "kill the Americans and plunder their money whenever and wherever they find it" [1], the Fatwa is a broad message directed to all Muslims. Bin Laden considers American invasions, occupation, and fighting in the Middle East and the weakening of Israel's (Arab, mostly Muslim) regional enemies as "attacking [Muslim] religion and life" [1] and therefore warranting a jihad. While jihad against military invasion broadly corresponds to a historical (though perhaps not religious) context, bin Laden's jihad does not consider other, more peaceful alternatives, which is not in line with historical applications of jihad.

Bin Laden's primary justification of jihad is the American military activity in the Middle East during and after the Gulf War, during which they "occupied the lands of Islam ... plundered its riches, dictated to its rulers, humiliated its people" [1]. He specifically cites the destruction of Iraq (an Islamic state) as evidence of this American "invasion," and concludes that all of this means a clear "declaration of war on God" [1]. If interpreted in this way, jihad in this situation is most certainly in line with historical interpretation – not only was jihad used by Muhammad and his small group of believers defensively when they were under threat from the Quraysh, it was also later used offensively against surrounding tribes and territories (initially the Fertile Crescent and Egypt [2]) to bring them under the caliph's rule. David Cook maintains that "one of the goals of jihad was to conquer and dominate non-Muslims" [2, p. 10] and therefore justifies the "great Muslim conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries" [2, p. 11]. An invasion of the United States itself would be in line with how jihad was applied historically, not to mention defending Muslims against a perceived American invasion!

However, bin Laden's jihad is new in some ways as well. Historically, the sword was always accompanied with the hand of diplomacy. In many cases, such as the early Muslim conquest of Mecca itself, and of various Sasanian cities, non-believers had the option of being relatively unmolested if they only paid the poll tax to the caliphate, or if they were willing to negotiate. A sense of leniency was always present; according to Cook on page 20 he specifies that before actual fighting, the Muslims should first "call them to Islam" or "if they refuse, call them to pay the poll tax." This element is conspicuously missing from bin Laden's fatwa, in which he calls immediately for "the [killing of] the Americans and their allies" [1] without first demanding a conversion to Islam or the payment of taxes. As ridiculous as it sounds to demand the Americans convert or to pay a tax, bin Laden's jihad does not correspond to what has been done historically. It should be noted as well that bin Laden goes to great lengths to justify why he – someone not in a position of power in the Islamic world – is authorized to call for jihad; he cites that "jihad is an individual duty" if "the enemy destroys Muslim countries" [1]. However, this was also historically uncommon, as all jihads had been initiated and led by a powerful leader, be it Muhammad himself, or an ensuing caliph; no jihad was started by a vagabond like bin Laden.

Lastly, bin Laden also cites the service of Israel and the weakening of Israel's enemies as worthy justification, and part of the "war on God." Specifically, bin Laden cites "Israel's survival" as a "brutal crusade occupation of the Peninsula" [1], clearly implying that Israel should be destroyed, since it is a "crusade." There is the clear distinction of Muslims above Jews and Christians in the Quran [2, p. 10]. At the same time, however, Jews historically lived peacefully among Muslims in the caliphate and almost never was there open conflict between

Muslims and Jews. In this light, bin Laden's dislike of Jews is historically unremarkable, but he is introducing a new type of jihad when he calls for the destruction of Israel.

In conclusion, bin Laden's Second Fatwa cites American invasion and the Jewish state as direct assaults on Muslims and should be responded to via jihad. While the broad concept of jihad against the invader, and to conquer non-believers, is very prominent historically, bin Laden's new form of jihad is unique compared to historical jihad because it disregards peaceful alternatives and includes an uncanny hatred of Israel.

References

- [1] Osama bin Laden. *Al Qaeda's Second Fatwa*. February 1998.
- [2] Cook, David. *Understanding Jihad*. University of California Press, 2005.

[2, p. 15] = source 2, page 15