

Osama Rallies Muslims, Condemns Hussein

By William Rivers Pitt

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Wednesday 12 February 2003

Osama bin Laden rose from the dead yet again on Tuesday to prophesy doom and death for America. This is nothing new; he has been clawing his way out of various burial holes for seventeen months now, and always manages to strike fear into the American heart by way of the American media and the Bush administration at exactly the moment when incredibly important shifts in history are in the offing.

At this moment, George W. Bush stands almost completely alone in his desire to make pre-emptive war on the nation of Iraq. Several key NATO allies - France, Germany and Belgium among them - have thrown sand into the gears of battle by refusing to prepare Turkey for an immediate war they do not support nor deem necessary. As this incredible state of affairs unfolded, Americans found their ears ringing with orange-hued warnings of imminent death. Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge went so far as to tell people to load up on plastic sheeting and duct tape so as to bar their windows from chemical attack, but the administration he calls home made sure to tell people to live their lives normally and continue shopping.

And so it goes. This is fairly standard stuff within the American echo chamber. Let there be one important piece of legislation, or one highly embarrassing turn of events for the administration, and the word goes forth that the sky is falling. We have been dealing with this politically manufactured low-grade hysteria for many months now. Most Americans have reached a suspended state of disbelief about it all, and won't be taking these warnings seriously unless they see Osama bin Laden on their doorstep in a black cassock with scythe in hand. Bush and Ashcroft will soon run out of colors on the warning chart if this keeps up; the shade after red likely exists somewhere in the fourth dimension, visible only to ultraconservative war-hawks and media talking heads.

When the voice of Osama comes out of the television, however, things suddenly become much more serious. The Bush administration may have forgotten him entirely, but every single American still sleeps with visions of burning towers and plummeting bodies projected on the backs of their eyelids. Peter Bergen, noted terrorism expert, stated on CNN that such messages from bin Laden usually herald new attacks. If the Orange Alert was dubious on Monday, it was given new importance on Tuesday.

Secretary of State Colin Powell set the stage for this new bin Laden statement early on Tuesday, much to the surprise of CIA Director George Tenet. Powell, during testimony at a Senate Budget Committee meeting, let it drop that the Middle East news network Al Jazeera had in hand a tape of Osama bin Laden. Tenet, seated with the Intelligence Committee, had not heard of this tape. One is left wondering at Powell's sources, especially after the story unfolded.

Powell used the existence of this tape, and the words he claimed bin Laden had said on it, to further tie Saddam Hussein to international terrorism. He claimed bin Laden was clearly establishing a connection between himself and Hussein on the tape, beyond all question. "This nexus between terrorists and states that are developing weapons of mass destruction," said Powell, "can no longer be looked away from and ignored."

The actual tape, played and translated live on every major cable news channel, told a very different story. Osama bin Laden swore vengeance against America if Iraq was attacked, and demanded that the Muslim world stand in solidarity with the Muslim people of Iraq. In very clear words, Osama bin Laden told the people of Iraq

to rise up against both American aggression and against "socialist" Saddam Hussein. If the translations that were provided were reliable, there is no ambiguity in bin Laden's words on the matter. So much, it seems, for Powell's case that Hussein and bin Laden are working together.

And this is where it gets interesting.

An MSNBC.com report on the bin Laden tape carried the following sentence: "At the same time, the message also called on Iraqis to rise up and oust Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, who is a secular leader." This clearly confirms the clarity of mind Osama bin Laden displayed in regard to Saddam Hussein, and conforms to the recorded message heard by millions and millions of people around the world.

Less than twenty minutes after this report appeared on MSNBC, that sentence was deleted from the report. A few intrepid Internet news junkies, including myself, preserved what is called a 'screen-grab' of the original article before it was scrubbed. The version of the article currently in existence has replaced the text above with this far more benign text: "The taped statement reflected Saddam, a secular leader, but made it clear that Saddam was not the immediate target." A similar story line, bereft of the portions describing bin Laden's wish that Hussein be killed, has appeared in virtually every mainstream news media report on the matter.

The manner in which this story unfolded brings forth a number of serious questions.

First of all, questions must be asked regarding Colin Powell's motives in this. The recording heard by the world diverged significantly from the spin Powell put on it before the Budget Committee. Osama bin Laden did not state an alliance with Saddam Hussein, but with the Muslim civilians in Iraq who will bear the bloody brunt of any American attack. In fact, bin Laden told the Iraqi people to rise up against Hussein. This is not the way allies deal with each other.

Why would Powell go to such lengths to stretch the glaringly obvious truth in this matter? He is already suffering from a deficit of credibility in the aftermath of the plagiarism scandal that is currently rocking Tony Blair's administration. Powell stood before the UN last week and praised a British intelligence dossier that contained cut-and-pasted pages and pages of an essay, with all spelling and grammatical errors intact, written by a postgraduate student from California. The data was years out of date, flat-out contradictory in several key areas, used without the student's awareness, and yet was offered as an up-to-the-minute assessment of Iraqi weapons capabilities.

This, in combination with Powell's obviously skewed interpretation of Tuesday's bin Laden recording, forces us to call into question every single word he and the Bush administration have said on the matter. The question of whether Saddam Hussein has ties to al Qaeda terrorism and Osama bin Laden can be put to bed now, it seems, alongside the tatters and shreds of honor and dignity formerly enjoyed by the Secretary of State.

More ominously, why would a news network like MSNBC so obviously haul water for the failed allegations of the Bush administration? Events happen in seconds on the internet, but merely scrubbing uncomfortable sentences from articles cannot stop the tens of thousands of readers who are wise enough now to save the evidence before it evaporates in a cloud of silicon.

These deletions display a manifest breach of faith on behalf of MSNBC, and call to mind issues surrounding the conflict of interest that are inherent in the ownership of this network. MSNBC, along with NBC and CNBC, are owned by the corporate giant General Electric. GE is one of the largest defense contractors on the face of

the earth, and will, bluntly, be paid a king's ransom in the event of a war. Following this line of questioning leads to some dark corners, indeed. How often is the data being manipulated by the corporate-owned media? Are we to rely solely on the nimble fingers of keyboarded citizens to get to the heart of the matter?

A report appearing later on Tuesday on MSNBC.com served to refute the claims of collusion between bin Laden and Hussein. "Although Powell sought to characterize the tape as a concrete link between al-Qaida and the Iraqi government," the MSNBC.com report read, "White House officials acknowledged later to NBC News that it did not. Powell did not know it had not been broadcast when he spoke to the committee and was 'a little on the front of his skis,' a government source said." These lines were buried deep within the report.

By Wednesday morning, this text had been completely removed from the article.

Finally, we must deal with Osama bin Laden himself. In a gross display of celestial irony, there was virtually no ambiguity in his words, as opposed to those of Powell and the members of the journalistic realm. His statement was a call to arms directed at the followers he has across the globe. If the United States attacks Iraq, Osama bin Laden will attack the United States. The Bush administration has done nothing of substance to defend us against such attacks except increase the stock value of companies that manufacture plastic sheeting and duct tape. We are not prepared to defend ourselves in this fight, period.

Virtually the entire global community stands against us today on the subject of this war, with nations willing and able to destroy NATO before allowing it to take place. The Bush administration has cut billions of dollars from street-level homeland defenders like police forces and fire houses, yet has the eagle screaming for a war that will be fought simultaneously in downtown Baghdad and in your utterly undefended neighborhood. They have the gall, simultaneously, to speak of trillion dollar tax cuts for rich people that will further debilitate our budgetary ability to defend ourselves. Links between Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein have proven to be not only false, but laughable. The credibility of the Bush administration has been destroyed.

And yet we go, with the news media whistling 'Onward Christian Soldiers' all the while. The Bush administration is ecstatic, believing they can spin bin Laden's statement of support for Iraqi civilians into a connection between the terrorist and Hussein.

You are being lied to, clumsily.

Pass it on.

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