

Two Dangerous Loomings: Part III
Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden: Their Early Years

And the Afghan War with the Soviet Union

1 January 2008

In a chapter of his book entitled, 'The Sporting Club,' Lawrence Wright provides detailed descriptions of two of the most prominent architects of the global Salafist Islamic fundamentalist movement. He writes [1], "Ayman al-Zawahiri, the man who would lead Qutb's **vanguard**, grew up in a quiet middle-class suburb called Maadi, five miles south of the noisy chaos of Cairo. It was an unlikely breeding ground for revolution. A consortium of Egyptian Jewish financiers, intending to create a kind of English village amid the mango and guava plantations and the Bedouin settlements on the eastern bank of the Nile, began selling lots in the first decade of the twentieth century. The developers regulated everything, from the height of the garden fences to the color of the shutters on the grand villas lining the streets. Like Nathan Meeker, the founder of Greeley, the creators of Maadi dreamed of a utopian society, one that was not only safe and clean and orderly but also tolerant and at ease in the modern world...Many of the early settlers were British military officers and civil servants, whose wives started garden clubs and literary salons; they were followed by Jewish families, who by the end of World War II made up nearly a third of Maadi's population. After the war, Maadi evolved into a melange of expatriate Europeans, American businessmen and missionaries, and a certain type of Egyptian -- typically one who spoke French at dinner and followed the cricket matches."

"The careful regulations of the founders could not withstand the crush of Cairo's burgeoning population, however, and in the 1960s another Maadi took root within this exotic community. Road 9 ran beside the train tracks that separated the tony side of Maadi from the *baladi* district -- the native part of town, where the irrepressible ancient squalor of Egypt unfurled itself. Donkey carts clopped along the unpaved streets past peanut vendors and yam salesmen hawking their wares and fly-studded carcasses hanging in the butcher shops. There was also, on this side of town, a narrow slice of the middle class -- teachers and midlevel bureaucrats among them -- who were drawn by Maadi's cleaner air and the nearly impossible prospect of crossing the tracks and being welcomed into the club."

"In 1960 Dr. Mohammed Rabie al-Zawahiri and his wife, Umayma, moved from Heliopolis to Maadi. Rabie and Umayma belonged to two of the most prominent families in Egypt [2]. The Zawahiri (pronounced za -*wah* -iri) clan was already on its way to becoming a medical dynasty. Rabie was a professor of pharmacology at Ain Shams University. His brother was a highly regarded dermatologist and an expert on venereal diseases. The tradition they established would continue in the next generation: a 1995 obituary in a Cairo newspaper for Kashif al-Zawahiri, an engineer, mentioned forty-six members of the family, thirty-one of whom were doctors or chemists or pharmacists scattered throughout the Arab world and the United States; among the others were an ambassador, a judge, and a member of parliament."

"The Zawahiri name, however, was associated above all with religion. In 1929 Rabie's uncle Mohammed al-Ahmadi al-Zawahiri became the rector of al-Azhar, the thousand-year-old university in the heart of Cairo, which is still the center of Islamic learning in the Middle East. The leader of the institution enjoys a kind of papal status in the Muslim world. Imam Mohammed is remembered as the institution's great modernizer, although he was highly unpopular at the time and eventually was driven out of office by student and faculty strikes protesting his policies. Rabie's father and grandfather were al-Azar scholars as well."

"Umayma Azzam, Rabie's wife, was from a clan that was equally distinguished, but wealthier and more political. Her father, Dr. Abdul Wahhab Azzam, was the president of Cairo University and the founder of King Saud University in Riyadh. Along with his busy academic life, he also served as the Egyptian ambassador to Pakistan, Yemen, and

Saudi Arabia. He was the most prominent pan-Arab intellectual of his time. His uncle had been a founder and the first secretary-general of the Arab League."

"Despite their remarkable pedigrees, Professor Zawahiri and Umayma settled into an apartment on Street 100, on the *baladi* side of the tracks. Later they rented a duplex at Number 10, Street 154, near the train station. Maadi society held no interest for them. They were religious, but not overtly pious. Umayma went about unveiled, but that was not unusual; public displays of religious zeal were rare in Egypt then and almost unheard-of in Maadi. There were more churches than mosques in the neighborhood, and a thriving Jewish synagogue as well."

"Children quickly filled the Zawahiri home. The oldest, Ayman, and his twin sister, Umnya, were born on June 19, 1951. The twins were at the top their classes all the way through medical school. A younger sister, Heba, born three years later, also became a doctor. The two other children, Mohammed and Hussein, trained as architects."

"For anyone living in Maadi in the fifties and sixties, there was one defining social standard: membership in the Maadi Sporting Club. All of Maadi society revolved around it. Because the Zawahiris never joined, Ayman would always be curtailed off from the center of power and status. The family developed the reputation of being conservative and a little backward -- *saeedis*, to use the term applied to them, referring to people from a district in Upper Egypt, which informally translates to 'hicks.'"

Ayman al-Zawahiri was an excellent student [3], and invariably earned the respect of his teachers. His classmates thought he was a 'genius, but he was introspective and often appeared to be daydreaming in class...Indeed, Ayman earned perfect grades with little effort...Zawahiri's uncle Mahfouz, the patriarch of the Azzam clan, observed that although Ayman followed the Zawahiri medical tradition, he was actually closer to his mother's side of the family -- the political side. Since the first Egyptian parliament, more than 150 years ago, there have been Azzams in government, but always in the opposition. Mahfouz carried on the tradition of resistance, having been imprisoned at the age of fifteen for conspiring against the government. In 1945 Mahfouz was arrested again, in a roundup of militants following the assassination of Prime Minister Ahmed Mahir. 'I myself was going to do what Ayman has done,' he boasted."

"Sayyid Qutb had been Mahfouz Azzam's Arabic teacher in the third grade, in 1936, and Qutb and his young protégé formed a lifelong bond. Later, Azzam wrote for the Muslim Brothers magazine that Qutb published in the early years of the revolution. He then became Qutb's personal lawyer and was one of the last people to see him before his execution. Azzam entered the prison hospital where Qutb was preparing to die. Qutb was calm. He signed a power of attorney, awarding Azzam the authority to dispose of his property; then he gave him his personal Quran, which he inscribed - a treasured relic of the martyr."

"Young Ayman al-Zawahiri heard again and again from his beloved uncle Mahfouz about the purity of Qutb's character and the torment he had endured in prison [4]. The effect of those stories...[produced in Ayman a] stiff-necked defiance of authority...[that shows his] personal fearlessness, his self-righteousness, and his total conviction of the truth of his own beliefs -- headstrong qualities that would invariably be associated with him in the future and that would propel him into conflict with nearly everyone he would meet. Moreover, his contempt for the authoritarian secular government ensured that he would always be a political outlaw. These rebellious traits, which might have been chaotic in a less disciplined man, were organized and given direction by an abiding mission in his life: to put Qutb's vision into action." And that he did -- in spades!

"The Nasserite regime thought that the Islamic movement received a deadly blow with the execution of Sayyid

Qutb and his comrades,' Zawahiri later wrote. 'But the apparent surface calm concealed an immediate interaction with Sayyid Qutb's ideas and the formation of the nucleus of the modern Islamic jihad movement in Egypt.' Indeed, the same year that Sayyid Qutb went to the gallows, Ayman al-Zawahiri helped form an underground cell devoted to overthrowing the government and establishing an Islamist state. He was fifteen years old."

Wright describes the networking of this cell [5]. "We were a group of students from Maadi High School and other schools,' Zawahiri later testified. The members of his cell usually met in each other's homes; sometimes they got together in mosques and then moved to a park or a quiet spot on the boulevard along the Nile. There were five of them in the beginning, and before long Zawahiri became the emir, or leader. He continued to quietly recruit new members to a cause that had virtually no chance of success and could easily have gotten them all killed. 'Our means didn't match our aspirations,' he conceded in his testimony. But he never questioned his decision."

"The prosperity and social position enjoyed by the residents of Maadi, which had insulated them from the political whims of the royal court, now made them feel targeted in revolutionary Egypt. Parents were fearful of expressing their opinions even in front of their children. At the same time, clandestine groups such as the one Zawahiri joined were springing up all over the country. Made up mainly of restless and alienated students, these groups were small, disorganized, and largely unaware of one another. Then came the 1967 war with Israel."

"After years of rhetorical attacks on Israel, Nasser demanded the removal of UN peacekeepers in the Sinai and then blockaded the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Israel responded with an overwhelming preemptive attack that destroyed the entire Egyptian air force within two hours. When Jordan, Iraq, and Syria joined the war against Israel, their air forces were also wiped out that same afternoon. In the next few days Israel captured all of the Sinai, Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, while crushing the forces of the frontline Arab states. It was a psychological turning point in the history of the modern Middle East. The speed and decisiveness of the Israeli victory in the Six Day War humiliated many Muslims who had believed until then that God favored their cause. They had lost not only their armies and their territories but also faith in their leaders, in their countries, and in themselves. The profound appeal of Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt and elsewhere was born in this shocking debacle. A newly strident voice was heard in the mosques; the voice said that they had been defeated by a force far larger than the tiny country of Israel. God had turned against the Muslims. The only way back to Him was to return to the pure religion. The voice answered despair with a simple formulation: Islam is the solution."

"There was in this equation the tacit understanding that God sided with the Jews. Until the end of World War II, there was little precedent in Islam for the anti-Semitism that was now warping the politics and society of the region. Jews had lived safely -- although submissively -- under Muslim rule for 1,200 years, enjoying full religious freedom; but in the 1930s, Nazi propaganda on Arabic-language short wave radio, coupled with slanders by Christian missionaries in the region, infected the area with this ancient Western prejudice. After the war Cairo became a sanctuary for Nazis, who advised the military and the government. The rise of the Islamist movement coincided with the decline of fascism, but they overlapped in Egypt, and the germ passed into a new carrier"

"The founding of the state of Israel and its startling rise to military dominance unsettled the Arab identity. In the low condition the Arabs found themselves in, they looked upon Israel and recalled the time when the Prophet Mohamed had subjugated the Jews of Medina. They thought about the great wave of Muslim expansion at the point of Arab spears and swords, and they were humbled by the contrast of their proud martial past and their miserable present. History was reversing itself; the Arabs were as fractious and disorganized and marginal as they had been in *jahiliyya* times. Even the Jews dominated them. The voice in the mosque said that the Arabs had let go of the one weapon that

gave them real power: faith. Restore the fervor and purity of the religion that had made the Arabs great, and God would once again take their side."

"The primary target of the Egyptian Islamists was Nasser's secular regime. In the terminology of jihad, the priority was defeating the 'near enemy' -- that is, impure Muslim society. The 'distant enemy' -- the West -- could wait until Islam had reformed itself. To Zawahiri and his colleagues that meant, at a minimum, imposing Islamic law in Egypt."

"Zawahiri also sought to restore the caliphate, the rule of Islamic clerics, which had formally ended in 1924 following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire but which had not exercised real power since the thirteenth century. Once the caliphate was established, Zawahiri believed, Egypt would become a rallying point for the rest of the Islamic world, leading it in a jihad against the West. "Then history would make a new turn, God willing," Zawahiri later wrote, "in the opposite direction against the empire of the United States and the world's Jewish government."

"Nasser died of a sudden heart attack in 1970. His successor, Anwar al-Sadat, desperately needing to establish his political legitimacy, quickly set about making peace with the Islamists. Calling himself the 'Believer President' and 'the first man of Islam,' Sadat offered the Muslim Brothers a deal. In return for their support against the Nasserites and the leftists, he would allow them to preach and to advocate, so long as they renounced violence. He emptied the prisons of Islamists, without realizing the danger they posed to regime, especially the young Brothers who had been radicalized by the writings of Sayyid Qutb."

"In October 1973, during the fasting month of Ramadan, Egypt and Syria stunned Israel with simultaneous attacks across the Suez Canal into the occupied Sinai and on the Golan Heights. Although the Syrians were soon beaten back and the Egyptian Third Army was rescued only by UN intervention, it was seen in Egypt as a great face-saving victory, giving Sadat a badly needed political triumph."

"Nonetheless, Zawahiri's underground cell began to grow -- it had forty members by 1974...[Zawahiri] was a student in the Cairo University medical school, which was aboil with Islamic activism, but Zawahiri had none of the obvious attributes of a fanatic. He wore Western clothes -- usually, a coat and tie -- and his political involvement was almost completely unknown at the time, even to his family. To the few who knew of his activism, Zawahiri preached against revolution, which was an inherently bloody business, preferring a sudden military action designed to snatch the reins of government in a bold surprise."

"[A close observer of Egyptian politics and a friend of Ayman al-Zawahiri] sensed a shift in the student movement in Egypt. Young Islamic activists were appearing on campuses, first in the southern part of the country, then in Cairo. They called themselves al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya -- the Islamic Group [6]. Encouraged by Sadat's acquiescent government, which covertly provided them with arms so that they could defend themselves against any attacks by Marxists and Nasserites, the Islamic Group radicalized most of Egypt's universities. Different branches were organized along the same lines as the Muslim Brothers, in small cells called '*anqud*' -- a bunch of grapes. Within a mere four years, the Islamic Group completely dominated the campuses, and for the first time in the living memory of most Egyptians, male students stopped trimming their beards and female students donned the veil."

"Eventually the disparate underground groups began to discover one another [7]. There were five or six cells in Cairo alone, most of them with fewer than ten members. Four of these cells, including Zawahiri's, which was one of the largest, merged to form Jamat al-Jihad -- the Jihad Group, or simply al-Jihad. Although their goals were similar to those of the mainstream Islamists in the Muslim Brotherhood, they had no intention of trying to work through politics to

achieve them. Zawahiri thought such efforts contaminated the ideal of the pure Islamic state. He grew to despise the Muslim Brotherhood for its willingness to compromise."

"Zawahiri graduated from medical school in 1974, then served three years as a surgeon in the Egyptian Army, posted at a base outside Cairo. When he finished his military service, the young doctor established a clinic in the same duplex where he lived with his parents. He was now in his late twenties, and it was time for him to marry. Until then, he had never had a girlfriend. In the Egyptian tradition, his friends and relatives began making suggestions of suitable mates. Zawahiri was uninterested in romance; he wanted a partner who shared his extreme convictions and would be willing to bear the hardships his dogmatic personality was bound to encounter. One of the possible brides suggested to Ayman was Azza Nowair, the daughter of an old family friend."

"Like the Zawahiris and the Azzams, the Nowairs were a notable Cairo clan. Azza had grown up in a wealthy Maadi household. She was extremely petite -- like a young girl -- but extraordinarily resolute. In another time and place she might have become a professional woman or a social worker, but in her sophomore year at Cairo University she adopted the hijab, alarming her family with the intensity of her newfound religious devotion. 'Before that, she had worn the latest fashions,' said her older brother, Essam. 'We didn't want her to be so religious. She started to pray a lot and read the Quran. And, little by little, she changed completely.' Soon Azza went further and put on the *niqab*, the veil that covers a woman's face below the eyes. According to her brother, Azza would spend whole nights reading the Quran. When he woke in the morning, he would find her sitting on the prayer mat with the holy book in her hands, fast asleep."

"The *niqab* imposed a formidable barrier for a marriageable young woman, especially in a segment of society that still longed to be a part of the westernized modern world. For most of Azza's peers, her decision to veil herself was a shocking abnegation of her class. Her refusal to drop the veil became a test of wills. 'She had many suitors, all of them from prestigious ranks and wealth and elite social status,' her brother said. 'But almost all of them wanted her to drop the *niqab*. She very calmly refused. She wanted someone who would accept her as she was. Ayman was looking for that type of person."

"According to custom, at the first meeting between Azza and Ayman, Azza lifted her veil for a few minutes. 'He saw the face and then he left,' Essam said. The young couple talked briefly on one other occasion after that, but it was little more than a formality. Ayman did not see his fiancée's face again until after the marriage ceremony. He made a favorable impression on the Nowair family, who were a little dazzled by his distinguished ancestry but were put on guard by his piety. Although he was polite and agreeable, he refused to greet women, and he wouldn't even look at one if she was wearing a skirt. He never talked about politics with Azza's family, and it's not clear how much he revealed even to her. In any case, Azza must have approved of his underground activism. She told a friend that her greatest hope was to become a martyr."

"My connection with Afghanistan began in the summer of 1980 by a twist of fate, Zawahiri wrote in his brief memoir, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. While he was covering for another doctor at a Muslim Brothers clinic, the director of the clinic asked if Zawahiri would like to accompany him to Pakistan to tend to the Afghan refugees. Hundreds of thousands were fleeing across the border after the recent Soviet invasion. Zawahiri immediately agreed. He had been secretly preoccupied with the problem of finding a secure base for jihad, which seemed practically impossible in Egypt. 'The River Nile runs in its narrow valley between two deserts that have no vegetation or water,' he observed in his memoir. 'Such a terrain made guerrilla warfare in Egypt impossible and, as a result, forced the inhabitants of this valley to submit to the central government, to be exploited as workers, and compelled them to be recruited into its army.' Perhaps Pakistan or Afghanistan would prove a more suitable location for raising an army of radical Islamists who could eventu-

ally return to take over Egypt."

"Zawahiri traveled to Peshawar with an anesthesiologist and a plastic surgeon. 'We were the first three Arabs to arrive there to participate in relief work,' Zawahiri claims. He spent four months in Pakistan, working for the Red Crescent Society, the Islamic arm of the International Red Cross...Through his connection with local tribal chiefs, Zawahiri made several furtive trips across the border into Afghanistan. He became one of the first outsiders to witness the courage of the Afghan freedom fighters, who called themselves the 'mujahideen' -- the holy warriors. That fall, Zawahiri returned to Cairo full of stories about the 'miracles' that were taking place in the jihad against the Soviets. It was a war few knew much about, even in the Arab world, although it was by far the bloodiest conflict of the 1980s. Zawahiri began going around to universities, recruiting for jihad. He had grown a beard and was affecting a Pakistani outfit -- a long tunic over loose trousers."

"Zawahiri returned for another tour of duty with the Red Crescent Society in Peshawar in March 1981. This time he cut short his stay and returned to Cairo after only two months. Later he would write that he saw the Afghan jihad as 'a training course of the utmost importance to prepare the Muslim mujahideen to wage their awaited battle against the superpower that now has sole dominance over the globe, namely, the United States.'"

"When Zawahiri returned to his medical practice in Maadi, the Islamic world was still trembling from the political earthquakes of 1979, which included not only the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan but also the return of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to Iran and the toppling of the Peacock Throne -- the first successful Islamist takeover of a major country. When Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the exiled Shah of Iran, sought treatment for cancer in the United States, the ayatollah incited student mobs to attack the American Embassy in Tehran. Sadat regarded Khomeini as a 'lunatic madman...who has turned Islam into a mockery.' He invited the ailing Shah to take up residence in Egypt, and the Shah died there the following year."

"For Muslims everywhere, Khomeini reframed the debate with the West [8]. Instead of conceding the future of Islam to a secular, democratic model, he imposed a stunning reversal. His intoxicating sermons summoned up the unyielding force of the Islam of a previous millennium in language that foreshadowed bin Laden's revolutionary diatribes. The specific target of his rage against the West was freedom.' Yes, we are reactionaries, and you are enlightened intellectuals: you intellectuals do not want us to go back 1,400 years,' he said soon after taking power. 'You, who want freedom, freedom for everything, the freedom of parties, you want all the freedoms, you intellectuals: freedom that will corrupt our youth, freedom that will pave the way for the oppressor, freedom that will drag our nation to the bottom.' As early as the 1940s, Khomeini had signaled his readiness to use terror to humiliate the perceived enemies of Islam, providing theological cover as well as material support. 'Islam says: Whatever good there is exists thanks to the sword and in the shadow of the sword! People cannot be made obedient except with the sword! The sword is the key to paradise, which can be opened only for holy warriors!'"

"The fact that Khomeini came from the Shiite branch of Islam, rather than the Sunni, which predominates in the Muslim world outside of Iraq and Iran, made him a complicated figure among Sunni radicals. (The community of believers split after the death of Prophet Mohammed in 632 C.E. because of a quarrel over the line of succession. Those who call themselves Sunni supported the election of the caliphs, but another group, which became the Shia, believed that the caliphate should have passed through the Prophet's descendants, beginning with his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. Since then, the two branches have evolved numerous theological and cultural differences.). Nonetheless, Zawahiri's organization, al-Jihad, supported the Iranian revolution with leaflets and cassette tapes urging all Islamic groups in Egypt to follow the Iranian example. The overnight transformation of a relatively wealthy, powerful, modern country such as

Iran into a rigid theocracy showed that the Islamists' dream was eminently achievable, and it quickened their desire to act."

"Islamism was by now a broad and variegated movement, including those who were willing to work within a political system, such as the Muslim Brothers, and those, like Zawahiri, who wanted to wreck the state and impose a religious dictatorship. The main object of the Islamists' struggle was to impose Islamic law -- Sharia. They believe that the five hundred Quranic verses that constitute the basis of Sharia are the immutable commandments of God, offering a road back to the perfected era of the Prophet and his immediate successors -- although the legal code actually evolved several centuries after the Prophet's death. These verses comment upon behavior as precise and various as how to respond to someone who sneezes and the permissibility of wearing gold jewelry. They also prescribe specific punishments for some crimes, such as adultery and drinking, but not for others, including homicide. Islamists say the Sharia cannot be improved upon, despite fifteen centuries of social change, because it arises directly from the mind of God. They want to bypass the long tradition of judicial opinion from Muslim scholars and forge a more authentically Islamic legal system that is untainted by Western influence or any improvisations caused by the engagement with modernity. Non-Muslims and Islamic modernists, on the other hand, argue that the tenets of Sharia reflect the stringent Bedouin codes of the culture that gave birth to the religion and are certainly not adequate to govern a modern society. Under Sadat, the government had repeatedly pledged to conform to Sharia, but his actions showed how little that promise could be trusted."

"Sadat's peace agreement with Israel united the disparate Islamist factions. They were also inflamed by a new law, sponsored by the president's wife, Jihan, that granted women the right to divorce, a privilege not provided by the Quran. In what would prove to be his final speech, Sadat ridiculed the Islamic garb worn by pious women, which he called a 'tent,' and banned the *niqab* from the universities. The radicals responded by characterizing the president as a heretic. It is forbidden under Islamic law, to strike against a ruler unless he doesn't believe in God or the Prophet. The declaration of heresy was an open invitation to assassination."

"In response to a series of demonstrations orchestrated by the Islamists, Sadat dissolved all religious student associations, confiscated their property, and shut down their summer camps. Reversing his position of tolerating, even encouraging, such groups, he now adopted a new slogan: 'No politics in religion and no religion in politics.' There could scarcely have been a more incendiary formulation in the Islamist mind...Zawahiri envisioned not merely the removal of the head of state but a complete overthrow of the existing order. Stealthily, he had been recruiting officers from the Egyptian military, waiting for the moment when al-Jihad had accumulated sufficient strength in men and weapons to act...Although Zawahiri was the senior member of the Maadi cell, he often deferred to [one of the military officers], who had a natural sense of command -- a quality that Zawahiri notably lacked. Indeed, [the officer] observed that there was 'something missing' in Zawahiri, and once cautioned him, 'If you are a member of any group, you cannot be the leader.'"

Wright describes the plot and aftermath of the successful plot to assassinate Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981, which was carried out by three young members of the Maadi cell -- supposedly without the auspices of Zawahiri. Nevertheless, Zawahiri was rounded up along with a horde of others and sent to prison [9]. "Security forces greeted the incoming prisoners by stripping them naked, blindfolding and handcuffing them, then beating them with sticks. Humiliated, frightened, and disoriented, they were thrown into narrow stone cells, the only light coming from a tiny square window in the iron door...The screams of fellow prisoners who were being interrogated kept many men in a state of near madness, even when they weren't tortured themselves. Because of his status, Zawahiri was subjected to frequent beatings and other ingenious and sadistic forms of punishment created by Intelligence Unit 75, which oversaw Egypt's

inquisition."

"One line of thinking proposes that America's tragedy on September 11, 2001 was born in the prisons of Egypt. Human-rights advocates in Cairo argue that torture created an appetite for revenge, first in Sayyid Qutb and later in his acolytes, including Ayman al-Zawahiri . The main target of the prisoners' wrath was the secular Egyptian government, but a powerful current of anger was also directed toward the West, which they saw as an enabling force behind the repressive regime. They held the West responsible for corrupting and humiliating Islamic society. Indeed, the theme of humiliation, which is the essence of torture, is important to understanding the radical Islamists' rage. Egypt's prisons became a factory for producing militants whose need for retribution -- they called it justice -- was all-consuming."

"Montassir al-Zayyat, an Islamist attorney who was imprisoned with Zawahiri and later became his lawyer and biographer, maintains that the traumatic experiences suffered by Zawahiri in prison transformed him from being a relatively moderate force in al-Jihad into a violent and implacable extremist. Yayyat and other witnesses point to what happened to his relationship with Essam al-Qamari [his military officer friend], who had been his close friend and a man he keenly admired...[and who had escaped every attempt by the Sadat regime to capture him]. [After being severely tortured] Zawahiri colluded with his captors to entrap his friend and did so. As planned, Zawahiri went to the mosque [the arranged meeting place] and fingered his friend."

"Zawahiri himself doesn't admit to this in his memoir, except obliquely, where he writes about the 'humiliation' of imprisonment. 'The toughest thing about captivity is forcing the *mujahid*, under the force of torture, to confess about his colleagues, to destroy his movement with his own hands, and offer his and his colleagues' secrets to the enemy.' Perversely, the authorities placed Qamari in the same cell with Zawahiri after Zawahiri testified against him and thirteen others. Qamari received a ten-year sentence. 'As usual, he received the news with his unique calmness and self-composure,' Zawahiri recorded. 'He even tried to comfort me, and said, 'I pity you for the burdens you will carry,' In 1988 Qamari was shot to death by police after escaping from prison."

"The trial dragged on for three years...During this time, Zawahiri came face-to-face with Egypt's best-known Islamist, Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman [the 'blind' sheikh, now jailed for conspiracy to bomb the World Trade Center building in 1993], who had also been charged as a conspirator in the Sadat assassination. A strange and forceful man, blinded by diabetes in childhood but blessed with a stirring, resonant voice. Sheikh Omar had risen in Islamic circles because of his eloquent denunciations of Nasser, who had tossed him in jail for eight months without charges. After Nasser's death, the blind sheikh's influence increased, especially in Upper Egypt, where he taught theology at the Asyut branch of al-Azhar University. He developed a following among the students and became the leader of the Islamic Group...The theology of jihad requires a fatwa -- a religious ruling -- in order to consecrate actions that would otherwise be considered criminal. Sheikh Omar obligingly issued fatwas that countenanced the slaughter of Christians and the plunder of Coptic jewelry stores, on the premise that a state of war existed between Christians and Muslims."

"After Sadat finally attempted to rein in the Islamists, the blind sheikh took a three-year sojourn to Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, where he found wealthy sponsors for his cause. When he returned to Egypt, in 1980, he was not merely the spiritual advisor of the Islamic Group, he was the emir ... Although members of the two leading militant organizations, the Islamic Group and al-Jihad, shared the common goal of bringing down the government, they differed sharply in their ideology and tactics. The blind sheikh preached that all humanity could embrace Islam, and he was content to spread this message. Zawahiri profoundly disagreed. Distrustful of the masses and contemptuous of any faith other than his own stark version of Islam, he preferred to act secretly and unilaterally until the moment his group could seize power and impose its totalitarian religious vision."

"The Islamic Group and al-Jihad had collaborated under the leadership of Sheikh Omar, but those from al-Jihad, including Qamari and Zawahiri, sought to have one of their own in charge. In the Cairo prison, members of the two organizations had heated debates about the best way to achieve a true Islamic revolution, and they quarreled endlessly over who was the best man to lead it. Zawahiri pointed out that Sharia states that the emir cannot be blind. Sheikh Omar countered that Sharia also decrees that the emir cannot be a prisoner. The rivalry between the two men became extreme. Zayyat tried to moderate Zawahiri's attacks on the sheikh, but Zawahiri refused to back down. The result was that al-Jihad and the Islamic Group split apart once more. They would remain polarized by these two intransigent personalities."

"Zawahiri was convicted of dealing in weapons and received a three-year sentence, which he had nearly finished serving by the time the trial concluded. Perhaps in response to his cooperation in testifying against other defendants, the government dropped several additional charges against him...Released in 1984, Zawahiri emerged a hardened radical whose beliefs had been hammered into brilliant resolve. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a prominent sociologist at the American University in Cairo, spoke to Zawahiri soon after he got out of prison, and he noted a pronounced degree of suspicion and an overwhelming desire for revenge, which was characteristic of men who have been abused in prison. Torture may have had other, unanticipated effects on these intensely religious men. Many of them said that after being tortured they had had visions of being welcomed by the saints into Paradise and of the just Islamic society that had been made possible by their martyrdom."

According to Wright [10], "Ibrahim had done a study of political prisoners in Egypt in the 1970s. According to his research, most of the Islamist recruits were young men from villages who had come to the city for schooling. The majority were the sons of middle-level government bureaucrats. They were ambitious and tended to be drawn to the fields of science and engineering, which accept only the most qualified students. They were not the alienated, marginalized youth that a sociologist might have expected. Instead, Ibrahim wrote, they were 'model young Egyptians. If they were not typical, it was because they were significantly above the average in their generation.' Ibrahim attributed the recruiting success of the militant Islamist groups to their emphasis on brotherhood, sharing, and spiritual support, which provided a 'soft landing' for the rural migrants to the city...Zawahiri, who had read the study in prison, heatedly disagreed. He asserted that the recruits responded to the Islamist ideals, not to the social needs that the groups attended."

In a chapter titled, 'The Founder,' Wright introduces a new player in the drama of the Looming Tower, Osama bin Laden. He starts at the intersection of al-Zawahiri and bin Laden [11]. "At the age of thirty-four, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri was a formidable figure. He had been a committed revolutionary and the leader of an underground Islamist cell for more than half his life. His political skills had been honed by endless prison debates, and he emerged pious, bitter, and determined."

"Saudi intelligence says that he arrived in the Kingdom in 1985 on a pilgrimage visa, which he converted to a work visa...Zawahiri's attorney, and former prison mate, Montassir al-Zayyat, passed through Jeddah on his way to Mecca, and he found Zawariri sober and downcast. 'The scars left on his body from the indescribable torture he suffered caused him no more pain,' Zayyat later wrote, 'but his heart still ached from it. In Zayyat's opinion, Zawahiri had fled Egypt because the guilt of betraying his friends weighed so oppressively on his conscience. By testifying against his comrades while he was in prison, Zawahiri had lost his claim to leadership of al-Jihad. He was looking for a place where he could redeem himself and where the radical Islamist movement could gain a foothold. 'The situation in Egypt had been getting worse,' Zawahiri later wrote, 'you can say explosive.'"

"Jeddah was the commercial center of the Kingdom, the port of entry for the millions of pilgrims who passed through on their way to Mecca each year. Every Muslim who is capable of making the journey, called the hajj, is required to do so at least once. Some who remained became the founders of the great banking and merchant families -- the bin Mahfouzes, the Alirezas, the Khashoggis among them -- who could trace their immigrant roots to Yemen and Persia and Turkey. This cosmopolitan heritage set the city apart from the culturally and ethnically isolated interior. Here, in Jeddah, it was the families, not the tribes that mattered, and among the handful of names that dominated Jeddah society was that of bin Laden."

"Zayyat contends that Zawahiri and bin Laden met in Jeddah, and although there is no record of their first encounter, it is certainly likely. Zawahiri had already been to Afghanistan twice, before prison, and intended to return as soon as possible. The pipeline to Afghanistan ran directly through bin Laden's apartment. Anyone who gave money or volunteered for the jihad would have known the enterprising young Saudi. In any case, they were bound to discover each other sooner or later in the intimate landscape of jihad."

"In Arabic the name Jeddah means 'grandmother,' and according to legend the city's name refers to Eve, the grandmother of the human race, who is said to be buried in a spacious walled compound in the working-class neighborhood where Osama bin Laden grew up. In the twelfth century, a cult formed around her supposed tomb, which traced the remains of her body...The Wahhabis -- the creed-bound sect that predominates in Saudi Arabia -- who condemn the veneration of tombs, knocked the place down in 1928, soon after they occupied Jeddah, and today it is a typical Wahhabi graveyard, with long rows of featureless, unmarked graves like unplanted flower beds. Osama bin Laden's father was buried here after his death in an air crash in 1967 at the age of fifty-nine."

"One cannot understand the scale of the son's ambition without appreciating the father's accomplishment. Remote and powerful but humble in manner, Mohammed bin Awahd bin Laden was a legend even before Osama was born." Wright describes the talents of the prodigal father as he wends his way from small beginnings to the growth of a vast 'construction' empire based on his gaining favor with the ruling class of Saudi Arabia and enriching himself beyond his wildest imagination as the peninsula had become developed by foreigners in search of the 'black gold' of oil beneath the desert floor.

"It was a wonderful time to be in the construction business. King Saud was on a building spree -- palaces, universities, pipelines, desalination plants, airports -- and bin Laden's company was growing at a fantastic rate. In 1984 the seat of government moved from Jeddah to Riyadh, which involved building an entire bureaucratic complex, as well as the embassies, hotels, residences, and highways that would accompany the new capital...Through clever alliances with powerful foreign corporations, bin Laden began diversifying...[he built the road from Taif to Mecca] ... when it was completed, Saudi Arabia was finally united, and Mohammed bin Laden became a national hero."

Though a humble, generous, and private man, the extravagant side of Mohammed bin Laden's nature made itself evident when it came to women. Wright explains [12]. "Islam permits a man four wives at a time, and divorce is a simple matter, at least for a man, who only needs to declare, 'I divorce you.' Before his death, Mohammed bin Laden officially had fathered fifty-four children from twenty-two wives. The total number of wives he procured is impossible to determine, since he would often 'marry' in the afternoon and divorce that night. An assistant followed behind to take care of any children he might have left in his wake. He also had a number of concubines, who stayed in the bin Laden compound if they bore him children. 'My father used to say he had fathered twenty-five sons for the jihad,' his seventeenth son, Osama, later remembered."

Alia [Ghanem], a fourteen-year old girl, joined the elder bin Laden's household as the fourth wife, "...a position that is sometimes called the 'slave wife,' especially by the wives with more tenure...By comparison with the other wives, Alia was modern and secular, although like all of bin Laden's wives she was fully veiled in public, not even letting her eyes show through the several layers of black linen. Mohammed bin Laden and Alia's only child was born in Riyadh in January 1958, named Osama, 'the Lion,' after one of the companions of the Prophet. When he was six months old, the entire extended family moved to the holy city of Medina, where [the elder] bin Laden was beginning renovation of the Prophet's Mosque. For most of Osama's young life, however, he lived in Jeddah. Though his father was by now prosperous and esteemed, the family occupied a large, ramshackle house in al-Amariyya, a modest neighborhood with small shops and lines of laundry hanging off balconies...'Rest his soul, my father was very strict, and he would pay no attention to appearances,' Osama said. 'Our house was of a lower standard than most of the houses of the people working for us.'"

"Osama spent his early years among a horde of children in his father's house...The children rarely saw the great man, who was often away on business. Whenever he returned, he would call them into his office and gaze upon his vast brood. During the Islamic feasting days, he would kiss them and give each child a gold coin; otherwise, he rarely spoke to them...Mohammed bin Laden had a custom of marrying off ex-wives who had borne him children to employees of his company. The wives had little or no say in the matter. They sometimes found themselves marrying below what they now considered their station -- to a driver, for instance -- an arrangement that influenced the future standing of their children in the family. Alia was fortunate when Mohammed decided to divorce her. He awarded her to one of his executives, Mohammed al-Attas, who was a descendant of the Prophet. Osama was four or five years old. He moved with his mother a few blocks away ... Soon after Osama moved to the new house, Mohammed bin Laden died in a plane crash on his way to take another teenage bride..."

"The marriage between Alia and her second husband proved to be an enduring match. Attas was kind and calm, but his relation to his stepson was somewhat compromised by the fact that Osama was the child of his employer. As for Osama, he went from being in a house full of children to one in which he was the only child. Eventually three younger half brothers and a half sister would be born, and Osama oversaw them almost as a third parent...Osama enjoyed television, especially westerns. *Bonanza* was his favorite show, and he adored *Fury*, a series about a boy and his silky black stallion. On summer mornings, after the dawn prayer, the boys would play soccer. Osama was an average player who could have been better if he had concentrated on the sport. But his mind was always somewhere else...[his playmate across the street] found Osama to 'be calm, shy, almost girlish. He was peaceful, but when he was angry, he was frightening.'"

"After the death of Mohammed bin Laden, the trustee sent most of the sons to Lebanon for their education. Only Osama remained behind, which would always mark him as the most provincial of the bin Laden boys. This was despite the fact that he enrolled in Jeddah's best school, called al-Thagr, on the road to Mecca. King Faisal had created the school in the early fifties for the education of his own sons. It was a free public school, but the standards were extremely high and the rector reported directly to the king. Students could gain admission only by passing a highly competitive examination. The goal was to have all classes of Saudi society represented, entirely on the basis of merit. This policy was so strictly adhered to that several sons of King Kalid were booted out while he was still on the throne."

"Osama was a member of a class of sixty-eight students, only two of whom were members of the royal family. Fifty of his classmates went on to gain their doctorates. 'He was a normal, not excellent, student,' said Ahmed Badeeb, who taught Osama science courses for three years...All of the students dressed in Western clothes -- a jacket and tie during the winter, pants and shirt during the rest of the school year. Osama stood out because he was tall and gangly and physi-

cally slow to mature. As his classmates began sporting moustaches and goatees, bin Laden remained clean-shaven because his beard was so light. His teachers found him shy and fearful of making mistakes."

"In Osama's fourteenth year he experienced a religious and political awakening [13]. Some ascribe the change to a charismatic Syrian gym teacher at the school who was a member of the Muslim Brothers. Osama stopped watching cowboy shows. Outside of school, he refused to wear Western dress. Sometimes he would sit in front of the television and weep over the news from Palestine. 'In his teenage years, he was the same nice kid,' his mother later related. 'But he was more concerned, sad, and frustrated about the situation in Palestine in particular, and the Arab and Muslim world in general.' He tried to explain his feelings to his friends and family, but his passion left them nonplussed. 'He thought Muslims are not close enough to Allah, and Muslim youth are too busy playing and having fun,' his mother concluded. He began fasting twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, in emulation of the Prophet. He went to bed right after *isha*, the evening prayer. In addition to the five prayers a day, he set his alarm for one in the morning and prayed alone every night. Osama became quite stern with his younger half siblings, especially about rising early to go to the mosque for the dawn prayer."

"He was rarely angry except when sexual matters came up. When he thought one of his half brothers was flirting with a maid, Osama slapped him. Another time, when he was in a café in Beirut, one of his brother's friends produced a porno magazine. Osama made it clear that neither he nor any of his brothers would ever have anything to do with the boy again. There seems never to have been a moment in his entire life when he gave way to the sins of the flesh, venal or ribald behavior, the temptations of liquor, smoking, or gambling. Food held little interest for him. He loved adventure and poetry and little else but God."

"His intransigent piety was unusual in his elevated social circle, but many young Saudis found refuge in intense expressions of religiosity. Exposed to so few alternative ways of thinking even about Islam, they were trapped in a two-dimensional spiritual world; they could only become more extreme or less so. Extremism had its consolations, as it always does; in Osama's case, it obviously shielded him from his teenage sexual urges. There was also in his nature a romance of the spirituality of the desert, humble and stripped of distraction. Throughout his life, he would hunger for austerity like a vice: the desert, the cave, and his as yet unspoken desire to die anonymously in a trench in warfare."

"He had an adventurous adolescence -- mountain climbing in Turkey and big-game hunting in Kenya. On his family farm south of Jeddah, Osama kept a stable of horses, having as many as twenty at one time, including his favorite, a mare named al-Balqa. He liked to ride and shoot, just like the cowboys on his favorite television shows. Osama began driving early, and he drove fast..."

"In 1974, while he was still in high school, Osama married for the first time. He was seventeen, she was fourteen -- Najwa Ghanem, his cousin from his mother's village in Syria. She was unusually tall and quite beautiful. There was a small wedding party for the men in Osama's house, who never got to see the bride. Bin Laden's future sister-in-law, Carmen, described Najwas as meek and 'constantly pregnant.'"

"It was also during this time, in high school, that bin Laden joined the Muslim Brothers. The organization was very much an underground movement in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s. 'Only nerds were in it,' a fellow member recalled. The members were highly religious teenagers like bin Laden, and although they were not actively conspiring against the government, their meetings were secret and took place in private homes. The group sometimes went together on pilgrimages to Mecca, or on outings to the beach, where they would proselytize and pray. 'We were hoping to establish an Islamic state anywhere,' said Jamal Khashoggi, a friend of bin Laden's who joined the Brotherhood at about the same time. 'We

believed that the first one would lead to another, and that would have a domino effect which could reverse the history of mankind."

"Bin Laden entered King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah in 1976. He studied economics but he was more involved in campus religious affairs. 'I formed a religious charity at school, and we devoted a lot of time to interpreting the Quran and jihad,' he later said...In his first year in the university, bin Laden met Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, another member of the Brotherhood, who would become his closest friend...On weekends, they would head out into the desert between Jeddah and Mecca, usually staying at the bin Ladens' family farm, an oasis called al-Barood...bin Laden erected a small cabin, little more than a kitchen and a toilet, and began farming. He kept a small herd of sheep and a stable of horses..."

"It was a time of spiritual questioning for both of them [14]. 'Islam is different from any other religion; it's a way of life,' said Khalifa. 'We were trying to understand what Islam has to say about how we eat, who we marry, how we talk. We read Sayyid Qutb. He was the one who most affected our generation.' Many of the professors at the university were members of the Brotherhood who had been run out of Egypt or Syria. They had brought with them the idea of a highly politicized Islam, one that fused the state and the religion into a single, all-encompassing theocracy. Bin Laden and Khalifa were drawn to them because they seemed more open-minded than the Saudi scholars and were willing to lead them to the books that would change their lives, such as Qutb's *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Quran*. Each week, Mohammad Qutb, the younger brother of the martyr, would lecture at the school. Although bin Laden never formally studied with Qutb, he usually attended his public lectures. Qutb was extremely popular with the students, who noted his calm demeanor despite the fact that he had also endured the rigors of Nasser's prisons."

"At that moment Mohammed Qutb was jealously defending his brother's reputation, which was under attack from moderate Islamists. They contended that *Milestones* had empowered a new, more violent group of radicals, especially in Egypt, who used Sayyid Qutb's writings to justify attacks on anyone they considered an infidel, including other Muslims. Foremost among Qutb's critics has Hasan Hedaybi, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brothers, who published his own prison book, *Preachers Not Judges*, to counter Qutb's seductive call to chaos. In Hedaybi's far more orthodox theology, no Muslim could deny the belief of another so long as he made the simple profession of faith: 'There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His messenger.' The debate, which had been born in the Egyptian prisons with Qutb and Hedaybi, was quickly spreading throughout Islam, as young Muslims took sides in this argument about who is a Muslim and who is not. 'Osama read Hedaybi's book in 1978, and we talked about it,' Jamal Khalifa recalled. 'Osama agreed with him completely.' His views would soon change, however, and it was this fundamental shift -- from Hedaybi's tolerant and accepting view of Islam to Qutb's narrow and judgmental one -- that would open the door to terror."

"That same year, Osama and Najwa's son Abdullah was born. He was the first of their eleven children...Unlike his own father, Osama was attentive and playful with his children...but he was also demanding. He had unyielding ideas about the need to prepare them for the tough life ahead. On the weekends, he brought both his sons and his daughters with him to the farm to live with camels and horses. They would sleep under the stars, and if it was cold, they would dig and cover themselves with sand. Bin Laden refused to let them attend school, instead bringing tutors into the house, so he could supervise every detail of their education. 'He made them tough, not like other children,' said Jamal Khalifa. 'He thought other kids were spoiled.'"

"While they were still in the university, Osama and Jamal made a resolution. They decided to practice polygamy. It had become socially unacceptable in Saudi Arabia. 'Our fathers' generation was using polygamy in not a very good way. They would give equal justice to their wives,' Khalifa admitted. 'Sometimes they would marry and divorce in the same day. They Egyptian media used to put this on television, and it made a very bad impression. So, we said, 'Let's practice

this and show people we can do it properly.' In 1982 bin Laden set an example by marrying a woman from the Sabar family in Jeddah who was descended from the Prophet. She was highly educated, with a Ph.D. in child psychology, and taught at the women's college of King Abdul Aziz University. Seven years older than Osama, she bore him one child, a son, and became known as Umm Hamza."

"Managing two families wasn't easy, but bin Laden wasn't discouraged. He developed a theory of multiple marriages, 'One is okay, like walking. Two is like riding a bicycle: it's fast but a little unstable. Three is a tricycle, stable but slow. And when we come to four, ah! This is the ideal. Now you can pass everyone!'

"He married again a few years later a woman from the Sharif family in Medina, who was also highly educated -- she held a doctorate in Arabic grammar and taught at the local teachers college. They would have three daughters and a son, so this wife was known as Umm Khaled. His fourth wife, Umm Ali, came from the Gilaini family in Mecca, and she bore him three children."

"Academically undistinguished himself, and clearly uninterested, bin Laden would never pursue the respectable professions, such as law, engineering, or medicine, that might have given him independent standing. His brothers were being educated at the finest universities in the world, but the example that meant the most to him was that of his illiterate father. He spoke of him constantly and held him up as a paragon. He longed to achieve comparable distinction -- and yet he lived in a culture where individuality was discouraged, or at least reserved for royalty. Like other members of the Saudi upper class, the bin Ladens prospered on royal favors, which they were loath to put at risk. Moreover, they were outsiders -- still Yemenis, in the eyes of clannish Saudis. There was no political system, no civil society, no obvious route to greatness. Bin Laden was untrained for the clergy, which was the sole alternative to royal power in the Kingdom. His obvious future was to remain in the family company, far down the list in seniority, respected within his family orbit but never able to really make a mark."

"Bin Laden continued to pester his older brothers to let him work for the company, and finally they gave him a part-time job in Mina, in the holy complex of Mecca. They expected it to take six months, but bin Laden declared, 'I want to be like my father. I will work day and night with no rest.' He was still trying to finish his studies, so after classes he would race to Mecca, where his job was to level hills to make room for the new highways and hotels and pilgrimage centers that the Saudi Binladen Group was building. He insisted on working directly with the laborers he was supposed to oversee, and he spent many hours operating bulldozers and earth-moving equipment. It had already become unusual to see Saudis doing physical labor -- most such jobs were held by expatriates from the Philippines or the Indian subcontinent -- so the sight of the founder's lanky scion caked with the sweat and dust of heavy construction made a startling impression. 'I recall, with pride that I was the only family member who succeeded in combining work and doing excellently in school,' bin Laden later bragged; but, in truth, the schedule was unmanageable, even for him. At the end of the semester he dropped out of the university, a year short of graduation, and went to work for the company full-time."

"He was just over six feet tall -- not the giant that he was later made out to be...Bin Laden was in his early twenties, he was very handsome, with fair skin, a full beard, and broad, swollen lips. His nose was long and complex, being narrow and straight at the top, then abruptly spreading out into two broad wings with an upturned tip. He wore a black headband around his white headscarf, and under his scarf, his hair was short, black and frizzy. He was gaunt from fasting and hard work. His high, reedy voice, and his demure and languid manner added to an impression of frailty. 'He was confident and charismatic,' a friend observed. Even though religious scholars were present, bin Laden presented himself almost as an equal. When he spoke, his composure was spellbinding. Everyone in the room was drawn to him. 'What struck me is that he came from such a hierarchical family,' said a friend, 'but he broke the hierarchy.'" Indeed, his natu-

ral inclination and inspired genius of his time was to build a 'self-organizing' dynamical network (system) of global Salafist jihadis -- with no spider at the center of the web. It survives and grows today.

In a chapter of his book entitled, 'Change,' Wright describes how Osama bin Laden became involved in Afghanistan [15]. "On Christmas Eve 1979 Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. 'I was enraged and went there at once,' bin Laden later claimed. 'I arrived within days, before the end of 1979.' According to Jamal Khalifa, bin Laden had never even heard of the country of Afghanistan until that point and did not actually go there until 1984, which is when he first became noticed in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Bin Laden explained the trips he made before then were 'a big secret, so that my family wouldn't find out.' He became a courier, he said, delivering charitable donations from wealthy Saudis. 'I used to hand over the money and head straight back, so I wasn't really familiar with what was going on.'"

"The most influential figure in bin Laden's involvement with the Afghan cause was a charismatic Palestinian scholar and mystic named Abdullah Azzam [16]. Born in Jenin in 1941, Azzam fled to Jordan after Israel captured the West Bank in 1967. He went to al-Azhar University in Cairo, where he gained a doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence in 1973, two years behind his friend Omar Abdul Rahman, the blind sheikh [who conspired in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing]. He then joined the faculty of the University of Jordan, but his Palestinian activism got him dismissed in 1980. Soon he found a job leading prayers in the school mosque at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah."

"For aroused young Muslims such as Osama bin Laden, Sheikh Abdullah Azzam embodied in a modern fashion the warrior priest -- a figure that was as well established in Islamic tradition as the samurai in Japan. Azzam combined piety and learning with a serene and bloody intransigence. His slogan was 'Jihad and the rifle alone; no negotiations, no conferences, no dialogues.' Around his neck he wore the black-and-white Palestinian kaffiyeh, or scarf -- a reminder of his reputation as a freedom fighter. By the time he arrived in Jeddah, he was already well known for his courage and oratory. Tall and sturdy, with an impressive black beard distinctively forked by two bright streaks of white and dark eyes that radiated conviction, he mesmerized audiences with his vision of an Islam that would dominate the world through the force of arms."

"Despite his growing body of followers, Azzam was restless in Jeddah and eager to participate in the nascent Afghan resistance. 'Jihad for him was like water for a fish,' his wife, Umm Mohammed, said. He soon found a position for teaching the Quran and Arabic language at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan, and moved there as soon as he could, in November 1981."

"Soon he was spending each weekend in Peshawar, which had become the headquarters of the Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation. He visited the refugee camps and saw appalling suffering. He met with the leaders of the mujahideen -- the 'holy warriors' -- who made Peshawar their base. 'I reached Afghanistan, and I could not believe my eyes,' Azzam would later recall in his countless videos and speeches around the world. 'I felt as if I had been reborn.' In his renderings, the war was primeval, metaphysical, fought in a landscape of miracles. The Afghans, in his tableau, represented humanity in a pristine state -- a righteous, pious, pre-industrial people -- struggling against the brutal, soulless, mechanized force of modernity. In this war, the believers were aided by the invisible hands of angels. Azzam spoke of Russian helicopters being snared by ropes, and he claimed that flocks of birds functioned as an early-warning radar system by taking wing when Soviet jets were still over the horizon. Repeatedly in his stories mujahideen discover bullet holes in their clothes when they themselves are not injured, and the bodies of those who are martyred do not putrefy but remain pure and sweet-smelling."

"The struggle of Islam, as Qutb had framed it, and as Azzam deeply believed, was against *jahiliyya* -- the world of unbelief that had existed before Islam, which was still corrupting and undermining the faithful with the lures of materi-

alism, secularism, and sexual equality. Here in this primitive land, so stunted by poverty illiteracy and patriarchal tribal codes, the heroic and seemingly doomed Afghan jihad against the Soviet colossus had the elements of an epochal moment in history. In the skillful hands of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, the legend of the Afghan holy warriors would be packaged and sold all over the world."

"Azzam returned to Jeddah frequently, staying in bin Laden's guest flat on his trips to the Kingdom. He held recruiting sessions in bin Laden's apartment, where he magnetized young Saudis with his portraits of the suffering of the refugees and the courage of the Afghan mujahideen. 'You *have* to do this!' he told them. 'It is your duty! You have to leave everything and go!'"

"Bin Laden revered Azzam, who provided a model for the man he would become. For his part, Azzam was enchanted by his well-connected young host with his monastic habits. 'He lives in his house the life of the poor,' Azzam marveled. 'I never did see a single table or chair. Any Jordanian or Egyptian laborer's house was better than the house of Osama. At the same time, if you asked him for a million Riyals for the Mujahideen, he would write you out a check on the spot.'"

"Soon Jeddah became a transit station for young men who were answering Sheikh Abdullah's call to 'join the caravan' of the Afghan jihad. Paid agents rounded up prospects, pocketing half of the money -- typically, several hundred dollars -- that the recruits received when they signed up. Young Muslim pilgrims were particular targets. To get them to the front, agents promised them jobs with aid organizations that never materialized. Fugitives from Algeria and Egypt slipped into the country and were provided with false papers by Saudi intelligence. The Saudi Binladin Group, which maintained an office in Cairo for hiring skilled laborers to work on the two holy mosques, became known as a pipeline for radicals who wanted to fight in Afghanistan. It is probable that Zawahiri connected to the Egyptians coming through Jeddah, and that would have brought him into bin Laden's realm."

"Bin Laden opened a halfway house for the recruits and even put them up in his own apartment. In the summers, he ran special military camps for high school and college students. Despite his youth, he rapidly emerged as a talented fund-raiser. Wealthy individuals, including members of the royal family, eagerly contributed. The Saudi government encouraged these efforts by offering steep discounts on the national airline for flights to Pakistan, the dropping-off point for jihad. Crown Prince Abdullah personally donated dozens of trucks for the cause. It was a thrilling national effort, although it established charitable habits and associations that would later become ruinous. The people who rallied to the Afghan jihad felt that Islam itself was threatened by the advance of communism. Afghanistan meant little to most of them, but the faith of the Afghan people meant a great deal. They were drawing a line against the retreat of their religion, which was God's last word and the only hope of human salvation."

"Jamal Khalifa was completely persuaded by Azzam's arguments. Later, he spoke to his friend Osama and declared that he had decided to go to Afghanistan. As a sign of his approval, bin Laden proposed that Jamal marry his favorite sister, Sheikha. She was divorced and several years older than Osama, who was taking care of her and her three children...He agreed to meet her as soon as it could be properly arranged. When he did, he decided that Sheikha was 'the best I ever met in my whole life.' He put off the marriage for a year, however, in case he was martyred in Afghanistan."

In a chapter entitled 'The Miracles,' Wright chronicles the events by which the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan marshaled monetary, manpower, and other resources for the Afghan warlords to fight the Soviet invaders. A key player in this episode was Prince Turki al-Faisal, a son of the King of Saudi Arabia who was schooled in America and played a vital part in putting down a bloody uprising in Mecca against the King and became the head of Saudi Intelligence as a

reward. He became the man who held the Afghan account.

Wright tells us that [17] "One month after the Soviet invasion, Prince Turki al-Faisal paid a visit to Pakistan. He was shaken by the Soviet takeover of Afghanistan, which he saw as the first step in a march toward the warm waters of the Persian Gulf. Pakistan would be next. He believed the Soviet Union's ultimate target was to control the Strait of Hormuz at the base of the Gulf, where Oman reaches toward Iran like a fishhook for an open mouth. From there, the Soviets could control the supply route for the supertankers that ferried the petroleum from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Iran. Whoever commanded the strait had a knife at the throat of the world's oil supply."

"Turki's colleagues in the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) briefed him on the Afghan resistance, then took him to the refugee camps outside Peshawar. Turki was appalled by the scale of the suffering. He went back to the Kingdom vowing to dedicate more money to the mujahideen [the Afghan warlord 'freedom fighters'], although he believed that these ragged soldiers could never defeat the Red Army. 'Afghanistan was gone,' he decided. He only hoped to delay the inevitable Soviet invasion of Pakistan."

"Similar thinking was going on in Washington, especially by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was the U.S. national security advisor for the Carter administration. Brzezinski, however, saw the invasion as an opportunity. He wrote to Carter immediately, saying, 'Now we can give the USSR its own Vietnam war.' Looking for an ally in this endeavor, the Americans naturally turned to the Saudis -- that is, to Turki, the American-educated prince who held the Afghan account."

"Turki became the key man in the covert alliance of the United States and the Saudis to funnel money and arms to the resistance through the Pakistani ISI. It was vital to keep this program secret in order to prevent the Soviets from having the excuse they sought to invade Pakistan. Until the end of the war, the Saudis would match the Americans dollar for dollar, starting with only seventy-five thousand dollars but growing into the billions."

Wright accounts for how Osama bin Laden became a player in this enterprise. "The immediate problem Turki faced was that the mujahideen were little more than disorganized mobs. There were about 170 armed Afghan militias in the mid-1980s. In order to manage this chaos, the ISI anointed six major émigré parties as the designated recipients for aid. Afghan refugees, who numbered 3.27 million by 1988, had to sign up with one of the six official parties to qualify for food and supplies. The two largest of these, headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani, each had 800,000 people in Peshawar under their authority. Turki forcibly created a seventh official party that would better represent Saudi interests. Ittihad-e-Islami (Islamic Union) was privately funded through bin Laden and others and headed by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. An imposing and dashing Afghan warlord, six feet three inches tall, who draped himself in colorful blankets, Sayyaf spoke excellent classical Arabic from his years studying at all-Azhar University in Cairo. His devout Wahhabi beliefs were out of step with the Sufi traditions that predominated in Afghanistan before the war, but they were very much attuned to the interests of the Saudi Arabian government and its religious establishment. These seven mujahideen leaders came to be known, by the CIA and other intelligence agencies that were their principal means of support, as the Seven Dwarves."

"'Fear of bodily participation' kept bin Laden well away from the battlefield in the early years of the war, a fact that later caused him great shame. He limited his trips in Pakistan to Lahore and Islamabad, not even venturing as far as Peshawar, then shuttling back home to Jeddah. These frequent excursions eventually cost him his job. By walking away from the Saudi Binladin Group's reconstruction of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, he forfeited his share of the profit -- an amount that Abdullah Azzam calculated was...about \$2.5 million."

"In 1984 Azzam persuaded [bin Laden] to cross the frontier into Jaji, where Sayyaf had a camp high in the mountains above a major Soviet outpost. 'I was surprised by the sad state of the equipment and everything else -- weapons, roads, and trenches,' bin Laden recalled. 'I asked forgiveness from God Almighty, feeling that I had sinned because I listened to those who advised me not to go...I felt that this four-year delay could not be pardoned unless I became a martyr."

"During June 1984 bin Laden experienced his first bombardment by a Soviet aircraft. He claimed to have 'felt closer to God than ever.' ... Bin Laden immediately returned to Saudi Arabia, and before the end of Ramadan he raised a fortune for the mujahideen -- 'between five and ten million dollars,' Abdullah Azzam airily recalled. 'I don't remember for sure.' More than \$2 million of that came from one of bin Laden's half sisters. Until now bin Laden had been seen mainly as a promising acolyte of Sheikh Abdullah's, but suddenly he eclipsed his mentor as the chief private financier of the jihad."

"Azzam reacted by officially joining forces with his protégé. In September 1984, during the hajj, the two men met in Mecca. Although he was quiet and deferential, bin Laden already had his own plan. Perhaps it had been born in that attack in Jaji, when the Arabs all dove for the trenches. He had observed that the Afghans treated them as 'glorified guests,' not as real mujahideen. He suggested to Azzam that 'we should take on the responsibility of the Arabs, because we know them better and can provide more rigorous training for them.' The two men agreed to create a more formal role for the Arabs in Afghanistan, although there were few Arabs actually fighting the jihad at that time. Bin Laden undertook to change that by offering a ticket, a residence, and living expenses for every Arab -- and his family -- who joined their forces. That amounted to about three hundred dollars per month for each household."

"Azzam added to bin Laden's stunning announcement by issuing a fatwa that electrified Islamists everywhere. In a book eventually published under the title *Defense of Muslim Lands*, Azzam argued that jihad in Afghanistan was obligatory for every able-bodied Muslim. He had given an advance copy of the text to Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz, Saudi Arabia's chief cleric, who wrote a preface to the book and pronounced his own supporting fatwa in the bin Laden family mosque in Jeddah."

"Azzam's fatwa draws a distinction between a *farḍ ayn* and a *farḍ kifāya*. The first is an individual religious obligation that falls upon all Muslims, like praying and fasting. One cannot avoid such duties and be considered a good Muslim. If nonbelievers invade a Muslim land, it is *farḍ ayn* -- a compulsory duty -- for the local Muslims to expel them. If they fail, then the obligation expands to their Muslim neighbors. If they too, slack, or there is again a shortage of manpower, then it is upon the people behind them, and the people behind them, to march forward. This process continues until it becomes *farḍ ayn* upon the whole world.' A child does not need permission from his parent, nor a debtor from his creditor, nor even a woman from her husband to join the jihad against the invader. *Farḍ kifāya*, on the other hand, is a duty of the community. Azzam gives the example of a group of people walking along a beach. 'They see a child about to drown.' The child, he suggests, is Afghanistan. Saving the drowning child is an obligation for all the swimmers who witness him. 'If someone moves to save him, the sin falls from the rest. But, if no one moves, all the swimmers are in sin.' Thus Azzam argues that the jihad against the Soviets is the duty of each Muslim individually, as well as of the entire Muslim people, and that all are in sin until the invader is repelled."

"Bolstered by the imprimatur of bin Baz and other distinguished clerics, news of the fatwa circulated immediately through Islamic communities everywhere. Although it's true that the Arab Afghan movement began with these two events -- bin Laden's announcement of financial support for Arab mujahideen and Azzam's searing fatwa -- one would

have to say that their initial efforts were largely a failure. Rather few Arabs actually obeyed the summons, and many who did were drawn as much by bin Laden's money as by the obligation to defend Islam in the manner that Azzam prescribed."

"As soon as they returned to Pakistan, bin Laden and Sheikh Abdullah Azzam set up what they called the Services Bureau (Makhtab al-Khadamat) in a house bin Laden was renting in the University Town section of Peshawar. Bin Laden provided twenty-five thousand dollars a month to keep the office running. The house also served as a hostel for Arab mujahideen and the headquarters of Azzam's magazine and book publishing efforts. The Services Bureau was essentially a repository for the money that the two men were sweeping in through their intensive fund-raising efforts. Jamal Khalifa joined bin Laden and Azzam in the Services Bureau, and they struggled to ensure that the donations, which often came in suitcases full of cash, actually got into the hands of the refugees. Azzam's long-standing membership in the Muslim Brothers gave him an international circuit to call upon for his ceaseless promotion of the insurgency. Still, his efforts did not compare with those of bin Laden, whom he called 'this heaven-sent man' with a direct connection to the Saudi royal family and the petro-billionaires of the Gulf."

"Bin Laden also drew from his connection to Prince Turki. Twice a month Turki's chief of staff, and bin Laden's former science teacher, Ahmed Badeeb, traveled to Peshawar to deliver cash to the mujahideen leaders. The Saudi government contributed \$350 million per year for the Afghan jihad. This money was placed in a Swiss bank account controlled by the United States government, which used it to support the mujahideen; but the Saudis also ran their own programs privately, raising millions of dollars for their favored commanders. More than a tenth of the private money went to supplement bin Laden's unofficial activities."

"Turki says he first met bin Laden in 1985 or 1986 in Peshawar...Bin Laden would dutifully report his activities to Turki, such as bringing in heavy equipment and engineers to build fortifications. He struck the prince as shy, soft-spoken, friendly, 'almost gentle,' and highly useful...Through bin Laden, Turki could recruit young Arabs to the jihad, as well as provide training and indoctrination outside ISI control. Moreover, bin Laden was raising large sums of money off the books -- a trove that a skillful intelligence operator could put to use."

"The Services Bureau became a registry for young Arabs who turned up in Peshawar looking for a way to get into the war. It offered these men -- or, often enough, high school students -- guesthouses to stay in and directed them to the training camps. In a place where magical legends sprouted so easily, bin Laden soon became part of jihadi lore. Many of the Arab Afghans swore fealty to Azzam, but it was bin Laden who was paying their rent. His wealth and charity immediately distinguished him...He gave money to Sayyaf to start the University of Dawa al-jihad just outside Peshawar in the Tribal Areas, which would become internationally known as a terrorist training academy...He was not politically sophisticated, like some of the others in the bureau, but he was tireless -- 'an activist with great imagination,' Abdullah Anas, an Algerian who worked with him in the Services Bureau, observed. 'He ate very little. He slept very little. Very generous. He'd give you his clothes. He'd give you his money.'"

"Bin Laden did not, however, make much of an impression as a charismatic leader [18], especially in the shadow of Abdullah Azzam. 'He had a small smile on his face and soft hands, a hardened Pakistani mujahid recalled. 'You'd think you were shaking hands with a girl.' He was shy and serious, and he struck many as naïve...Sheikh Abdullah called the small band of Arabs who gathered in Peshawar the 'Brigade of the Strangers.' The Arabs kept to themselves, establishing their own mosques and schools and newspapers. Some had arrived with nothing in their pockets but a telephone number. Thanks to bin Laden's generous subsidy, many of them settled in the suburb of Hayatabad, a neighborhood of two-story tract houses at the edge of the Tribal Areas, provided with all the modern conveniences -- refrigerators, wash-

ing machines, dryers, and so on. Indeed, many of them lived more comfortably than bin Laden."

"Across the Kyber Pass was the war. The young Arabs who came to Peshawar prayed that their crossing would lead them to martyrdom and Paradise. As they passed the time, they traded legends about themselves, about the call that had drawn young Muslims to free their brothers in Afghanistan. In fact the war was being fought almost entirely by the Afghans themselves. Despite Azzam's famous fatwa and bin Laden's subsidies, there were never more than three thousand of these outsiders who came to be known as the Arab Afghans in the war against the Soviets and most of them never got out of Peshawar."

"The Arab Afghans were often unwanted renegades in their own countries, and they found that the door closed behind them as soon as they left. Other young Muslims, prompted by their own governments to join the jihad, were stigmatized as fanatics when they did so. It would be difficult for many of them ever to return home. These abandoned idealists were naturally looking for a leader. They had little to cling to except their cause and each other. As stateless persons they naturally revolted against the very idea of the state. They saw themselves as a borderless posse empowered by god to defend the entire Muslim people. That was exactly bin Laden's dream."

"In Peshawar, they adopted new identities. Few people in the Arab community used their actual names, and it was rude to ask. In this incognito underground, a child often did not know his father's real identity. The alias usually reflected the name of the mujahid's firstborn male child or some quality that suited his personality. A common jihadi name, such as Abu Mohammed, would be followed by his nationality -- al-Libi, for instance, 'the Libyan.' It was a simple code but difficult to decipher, since one had to know a man's reputation or his family in order to catch the reference."

Wright exhaustively describes the motivation for these young Arabs. "It was death, not victory in Afghanistan, that summoned many young Arabs to Peshawar. Martyrdom was the product that Azzam sold in the books, tracts, videos, and cassette tapes that circulated in mosques and Arabic-language bookstores. 'I traveled to acquaint people with jihad,' Azzam said, recalling his lectures in mosques and Islamic centers around the world. 'We were trying to satisfy the thirst for martyrdom. We are still in love with this.' Azzam visited the United States each year -- Kansas City, St. Louis, Dallas, all over the heartland and the major cities as well -- looking for money and recruits among the young Muslims who were mesmerized by the myths he spun."

"He told stories of the mujahideen who defeated vast columns of Soviet troops virtually single-handed. He claimed that some of the brave warriors had been run over by tanks but survived; others were shot, but the bullets failed to penetrate. If death came, it was even more miraculous. When one beloved mujahid expired, the ambulance filled with the sound of humming bees and chirping birds, even though they were in the Afghan desert in the middle of the night. Bodies of martyrs uncovered after a year in the grave still smelled sweet and their blood continued to flow. Heaven and nature conspired to repel the godless invader. Angels rode into the battle on horseback, and falling bombs were intercepted by birds, which raced ahead of the jets to form a protective canopy over the warriors. The miracle stories naturally proliferated as word spread that Sheikh Abdullah was paying for mujahids who brought him wonderful tales."

"Martyrdom promised ...young men an ideal alternative to the life that was so sparing in its rewards. A glorious death beckoned to the sinner, who would be forgiven, it is said, with the first spurt of blood, and he would behold his place in Paradise even before his death. Seventy members of his household might be spared the fires of hell because of his sacrifice. The martyr who is poor will be crowned in heaven with a jewel more valuable than the earth itself. And for those young men who came from cultures where women are shuttered away and rendered unattainable for someone

without prospects, martyrdom offered the conjugal pleasures of seventy-two virgins -- 'the dark-eyed houris,' as the Quran describes them, 'chaste as hidden pearls,' They awaited the martyr with feasts of meat and fruit and cups of the purest wine."

"The pageant of martyrdom that Azzam limned before his world-wide audience created the death cult that would one day form the core of al-Qaeda. For the journalists covering the war, the Arab Afghans were a curious sideshow to the real fighting, set apart by their obsession with dying. When a fighter fell, his comrades would congratulate him and weep because they were not also slain in battle. These scenes struck other Muslims as bizarre. The Afghans were fighting for their country, not for Paradise or an idealized Islamic community. For them, martyrdom was not such a high priority."

"Rahimullah Yusufzai, the Peshawar bureau chief for the *News*, a Pakistani daily, observed a camp of Arab Afghans that was under attack in Jalalabad. The Arabs had pitched white tents on the front lines, where they were easy marks for Soviet bombers. 'Why?' the reporter asked incredulously. 'We want them to bomb us!' the men told him. 'We want to die!' They believed that they were answering God's call. If they were truly blessed, God would reward them with a martyr's death. 'I wish I could raid and be slain, and raid and be slain, and then raid and be slain,' bin Laden later declared, quoting the Prophet."

"The Quran is full of references to jihad; some of them have to do with the inner striving for perfection, which the Prophet called the 'greater jihad,' but others explicitly command the believers to 'slay the idolaters wherever you find them' and to 'fight those who do not believe in God...until they pay the tax in acknowledgement of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.' Some Islamic scholars explain these injunctions by saying that they apply only when war is initiated by the infidels, or when Muslims are persecuted, or when Islam itself is threatened. The Quran, these thinkers point out, also bids the Muslims to 'fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, and be not aggressive; surely God loves not the aggressors.'"

"Under the spell of the Afghan struggle, many radical Islamists came to believe that jihad never ends. For them, the war against the Soviet occupation was only a skirmish in an eternal war. They called themselves jihadis, indicating the centrality of war to their religious understanding. They were the natural outgrowth of the Islamist exaltation of death over life. 'He who dies and has not fought and was not resolved to fight, had died a *jahiliyya* death,' Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brothers, had declared. He added, with a bit of residual Sufi mysticism, 'Death is art.'"

"The Quran explicitly states that 'there is no compulsion in religion.' That would seem to forbid waging war against non-Muslims and against Muslims who believe differently. Sayyid Qutb, however, scorned the notion that jihad is just a defensive maneuver to protect the community of faith. 'Islam is not merely 'belief,' he wrote. 'Islam is a declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men. Thus it strives from the beginning to abolish all those systems and governments which are based on the rule of man over men.' Qutb makes the argument that life without Islam is slavery; therefore real freedom cannot be achieved until *jahiliyya* is eliminated. It is only when the rule of man has been eradicated and Sharia imposed that there will be no compulsion in religion, because there is only once choice: Islam."

"The declaration of jihad was tearing the Muslim community apart. There was never a consensus that the jihad in Afghanistan was a genuine religious obligation. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the local chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood refuted the demand to send its members to jihad, although it encouraged relief work in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Those who did go were often unaffiliated with established Muslim organizations and therefore more open to radicalization. Many concerned Saudi fathers went to the training camps to drag their sons home."

"The fierce idealists who did respond to Azzam's message viewed Afghanistan as the beginning of Islam's return to international dominance, which would see not only the liberation of the Afghans but also the eventual recapture of all the territory, from Spain to China, that had been under enlightened Muslim domination while Europe was mired in the Middle Ages. The restoration of the former empire was only the first step, however. The next stage was the final war against unbelievers, culminating in the Day of Judgment."

"Untrained but eager for action, the Brigade of Strangers agitated until Azzam agreed to take them into Afghanistan to join forces with the Afghan commander Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was fighting the Soviets near Jihad Wal. Bin Laden and sixty Arabs rode across the border with a single Afghan guide. Thinking that they were headed directly into battle, they had stuffed their pockets with raisins and chickpeas, most of which they consumed during the long drive. They began referring to themselves as the Brigade of the Chickpeas. Around ten that night, they finally arrived at the Afghan camp, only to learn that the Soviets had retreated."

"Your presence is no longer needed,' Hekmatyar impatiently told them the following morning, 'so go back.' Azzam immediately consented, but bin Laden and some of the other Arabs expressed their dismay. 'If they have withdrawn, aren't we supposed do at least chase them?' they asked. Azzam set up some targets on fence posts so the men could have some shooting practice. Afterward, the Arabs surrendered their weapons to an Afghan commander and caught buses back to Peshawar. They began calling themselves the Brigade of the Ridiculous. When they got back to the city, they disbanded."

"In 1986 bin Laden brought his wives and children to Peshawar, where they joined the small but growing community of Arabs responding to Sheikh Abdullah Azzam's fatwa [19]. It was clear by then that the Afghans were winning the war. Admitting that Afghanistan was 'a bleeding wound.' Mikhail Gorbachev, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, offered a timetable for the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops. That was also the year that the American-made Stinger, the hand-fired missile that proved so deadly for Russian aircraft, was introduced, decisively tipping the balance in favor of the mujahideen. Although it would take another three bloody years for the Soviets to finally extricate themselves, the presence of several thousand Arabs -- and rarely more than a few hundred of them actually on the field of battle -- made no real difference in the tide of affairs."

"Arms shipments poured into the port of Karachi. The ISI, which divvied the weapons among the Afghan commanders, needed a repository, preferably outside of Pakistan but not within the grasp of the Soviets. There is a distinctive portion of the Tribal Areas that juts into Afghanistan along a range of mountains southwest of the Kyber Pass known as the Parrot's Beak. The northern slope of the Parrot's Beak is called Tora Bora. The name means 'black dust.' Remote and barren, the place is rich in caves made of super-hard quartz and feldspar. Bin Laden expanded the caverns and constructed new ones to serve as armories. It was here, in the warren of ammunition caves that he built for the mujahideen, that bin Laden would one day make his stand against America."

"In May 1986, bin Laden led a small group of Arabs to join Afghan forces in Jaji, in Sayyaf's territory near the Pakistani border. One night the Arab tents were pelted with what seemed to be rocks, perhaps debris thrown from the occasional distant bombs. When a Yemeni cook got up to prepare the pre-dawn meal, there was a huge explosion. 'God is great!' the cook cried out. 'My leg! My leg!' The Arabs awakened to find mines strewn around their encampment, although they were difficult to see because they were green and disappeared in the grass. As they were evacuating the site, a guided missile struck a few yards from bin Laden. Then a huge explosion on the mountaintop spewed boulders and splintered wood upon the besieged Arabs. Three were wounded and one, an Egyptian graduate student, was killed. The

Arabs were thrown into panic, and they were further humiliated when the Afghan forces asked them to leave because they were so useless."

"Despite this sorry display, bin Laden financed the first permanent all-Arab camp at the end of 1986, also at Jaji. This action put him at odds with his mentor, Azzam, who strongly opposed the plan. Each man was beset by a powerful and impractical dream. Azzam longed to erase the national divisions that kept the Muslim people from uniting. For that reason, he always sought to disperse the Arab volunteers among the various Afghan commands, even though few Arabs spoke the local languages or had received any practical training. They were cannon fodder. On the other hand, a fixed target such as the camp bin Laden envisioned was an extravagant waste of money and lives in the hit-and-run guerrilla warfare that the Afghans were waging. Bin Laden was already thinking of the future of jihad, and the Jaji camp was his first step toward the creation of an Arab legion that could wage war anywhere. Until now, he had subordinated his dream to the goals of the older man, but he was beginning to feel the tug of destiny."

"Desperate to stop bin Laden's drift from his orbit, Azzam dispatched Jamal Khalifa to reason with him. No one could speak more frankly or with more authority to bin Laden than his old friend and brother-in-law. Khalifa rode across the Afghan border with Sayyaf, who controlled the mountainous territory around Jaji. The camp was high and cold and exposed to merciless wind. Osama -- the Lion -- called the place Maasada, the Lion's Den. "

"At the time, bin Laden's version of Maasada looked nothing like the elaborate cavernous training center it eventually became. Khalif had been a devoted Boy Scout, and in his experienced eye this filthy and disorganized site hidden in the pine trees was far below even the standards of a children's encampment...Through binoculars Khalifa surveyed the Soviet base in a broad valley only three kilometers away. The Arabs were isolated and vulnerable. They had a single car that they used to smuggle water and supplies during the night, but they could easily be trapped and wiped out. They were already being carelessly expanded under bin Laden's command. Khalifa was furious at the needless risk and the waste of lives."

"[Khalifa] stayed for three days, talking to people around bin Laden -- mainly Egyptians associated with Zawahiri's al-Jihad and Saudi high school students...Khalifa learned that they had appointed bin Laden -- rather than Azzam or Sayyaf -- their leader. The news stunned him. He had never thought of his friend as one who would seek power...[He and bin Laden argued vehemently until finally] bin Laden cried, 'This is jihad! This is the way we want to go to heaven!' Khalifa warned him that the lives of [his] men were his responsibility. 'God will ask you about every drop of their blood. And since I am your friend, I cannot accept that you stay. You have to leave, or else I will leave you.' Bin Laden coldly refused. Khalifa left the camp. They would never be close again."

In a summary of bin Laden's leadership of his men during the Soviet/Afghan conflict, Austin Bay writes [20], "Mr. Wright documents bin Laden's inept record during the Afghan war against the Soviets. Hardened mujahideen regarded bin Laden as a buffoon and a poseur." But that criptic summary is much too condensed to give the enormity of bin Laden's complete ineptness in leading men in battle -- at any level. Here, the details are important in order to understand the magnitude of the delusional character of 'the Lion.' We must at least summarize these details in order to fully understand the role bin Laden actually played in the Afghanistan war with the Soviets.

Wright tells the story of one of bin Laden's cohorts who, in bin Laden's absence, attacked a small Soviet outpost with fourteen to sixteen young men. They [21] "...piled their heavy weapons onto a horse and began trekking down the mountain. The weapons kept sliding off the horse's back into the snow. [Sheikh Tameem, the middle aged 400-pound leader of the expedition] had no plan other than to attack the Soviets and immediately retreat, nor was he entirely sure

where he was going. If the Arabs actually engaged in a firefight with the enemy, Sheikh Tameem would be unable to run back up the mountain with the lithe young fighters who accompanied him. But, as usual, caution was not a feature of his scheme...Bin Laden had returned and he was alarmed. He ordered the men back to camp immediately."

"But Sheikh Tameem continued to present a challenge to bin Laden's authority, since many of the Arabs sided with him, saying that they had come for jihad, not for camping in the mountains. 'I was afraid that some of the brothers might return to their countries and tell their people that they had stayed here for six months without ever shooting a single gun,' bin Laden admitted. 'People might conclude that we don't need their support.' He had to prove that the Arabs were not just tourists, that they were capable of making a genuine contribution to the Afghan jihad. It was unclear how long he could keep men under his command if he failed to let them fight."

"On April 17, 1987, before the snows had fully melted, bin Laden led a force of 120 fighters to harass an Afghan government outpost near Khost. He chose to attack on Friday because he believed Muslims all over the world would be praying for the mujahideen. Both Sayyaf, the Arabic-speaking Afghan commander, and Hekmatyar agreed to provide covering artillery fire. The attack was set for six o'clock in the evening -- time enough for a quick strike, followed by darkness that would protect the men from the Soviet aircraft that would soon be raining bombs upon them."

"The impending battle was months in the planning and had been well advertised back in Peshawar...At the time of the scheduled attack, none of the positions had been supplied with ammunition, which was stuck in a car at the end of a road some distance away. The men were frantically transporting rockets and mortars on their backs or on the four mules they had available. Some fighters were already so exhausted that they slipped back to the Lion's Den to sleep, and those who stayed were famished and upset because the food had run out. At the last minute, one of the commanders discovered that no one had brought the electrical wire to connect the rockets to the detonators. He dispatched a man on a horse to gallop back to camp. On top of this, bin Laden was ill -- as he often was before battle -- although he tried to remain composed in front of his men."

"Sheikh Abdullah Azzam gave a rousing speech about the need to stand firm, but before the Arabs were ready to charge, an Afghan government soldier overheard their preparations and single-handedly kept them pinned down until nightfall with a Gorjunov machine gun. Bin Laden ordered his troops to withdraw. Amazingly, only one Arab was killed and two badly injured, but their pride was shattered -- they had been defeated by one man! The Afghan mujahideen were laughing at them. As a result of this fiasco, the Pakistanis began closing down the Arab guesthouse in Peshawar. It seemed that the Arab Afghan misadventure had come to an ignominious finale."

"The following month, a small band of Arabs engaged in another skirmish, this one planned by their Egyptian military commander, Abu Ubaydah, who led a flanking maneuver against a group of Soviet troops. 'There were nine of them and myself,' bin Laden later recounted. 'No one hesitates.' The Soviets fell back, and the Arabs were jubilant. But their brief victory prompted a stern Soviet counterattack against the Lion's Den. According to Abdullah Azzam's myth-making account, the Soviets assembled nine or ten thousand troops -- including Soviet Special Forces and Afghan regulars -- against only seventy mujahideen."

"The Arabs waited until the entire Soviet convoy was within range of their three mortars. When bin Laden cried, '*Allahu akhbar!*' the Arabs opened fire, and the surprised Russians fell back. The brothers were in a state of elation and total ecstasy,' Azzam wrote. They watched ambulances arriving to collect the fallen soldiers, who included the military commander of the Jaji district...Expecting another, larger Soviet counterattack, bin Laden divided his force in half, stationing thirty-five men to guard the Lion's Den. He and nine others advanced to the top of a hill, where they observed

two hundred Russian Special Forces creeping toward the camp. ‘Suddenly, mortar rounds began to pour on us like rain,’ said bin Laden. Miraculously, the Arabs escaped harm. An hour later, the Russians confidently resumed their advance. ‘When they reached the peak, we began our attack,’ bin Laden continued. ‘A few of them were killed, and the rest fled.’”

“For weeks, the Soviets shelled the mujahideen position around the Lion’s Den with 120 mm mortars and napalm bombs, which caused such devastation that Azzam wept and prayed for the safety of the fighters. The trees burned, even in the rain, illuminating the night. One morning, in this storm of shrapnel and fire, Sheikh Tameem [the 400 pound elder fool] emerged from [his] communications cave with his Quran in hand and began to wander around in the clearing, ignoring the pleas of his comrades as he recited the Quran and prayed aloud for martyrdom, his round wire-rimmed glasses tilted toward the sky. The ground shook and bullets and explosions tore the forest around him. It was near the end of Ramadan, and Tameem believed that his death on such an occasion would be especially blessed.”

“This mad excursion seemed to have a calming effect on the others. ‘We came under fire quickly,’ bin Laden recalled. ‘When the fire stopped for about thirty seconds, I told the people I was with that I thought we were going to die. But within minutes, the fire started again and I was reading the Holy Quran until we were saved and were able to move to a different location. We hadn’t moved seventy meters when we were hit again, but we felt completely safe, as if we were in an air-conditioned room.’”

“Despite the bravado, bin Laden worried that his men would all be killed if they stayed any longer. He would have to abandon the Lion’s Den. It was the worst defeat he had ever suffered. His men were shocked at his decision...Those who were able to walk followed behind [the retreating van], after destroying much of the Lion’s Den so that there would be nothing for the Soviets to pillage. They rolled their cannons into the ravines and buried their automatic weapons. One of the men threw a grenade into the pantry. The camp that they had labored so mightily to construct was now a ruin. A small squad stayed behind to provide cover for the retreating guerrillas...Once again, bin Laden was ill. ‘I was very tired, and could barely walk twenty meters before I had to stop and drink water. I had been under great emotional and physical duress.’ His ordeal had only just begun.”

“Sayyaf [the Afghan commander] was fuming when the bedraggled Arabs reached his camp. By now he had come to see the value of the Lion’s Den, which overlooked a strategic caravan route for the supply of the mujahideen. He abruptly countermanded bin Laden’s order and told the Arabs to return; he also sent some of his reliable Afghan warriors back to the camp with them to make sure that they held the position.”

“Embarrassed and exhausted, the fighters returned to the Lion’s Den in groups of five or ten. Dawn found twenty-five Arabs and twenty Afghans gathered in the ruins of the camp, dismally celebrating the feast day at the end of Ramadan. There was practically nothing to eat since the kitchen had been blown up. Each man received three lemons. Later in the morning, bin Laden returned with ten more fighters. Chastened and unwilling to assert his authority, he let his Egyptian military commander, Abu Ubaydah, take charge. The sight of the needless destruction of his camp at his own hand must have been unbearable...Abu Ubaydah decided to give him something to do. ‘Go and guard the left side of the camp,’ Abu Ubaydah told him. ‘I think they will only enter from this place because it is the shortest path.’”

Wright describes the utter ineptness of Osama bin Laden as a military commander [22]. His attempts to lead his Arab holy ‘warriors’ in battle against the Soviet Army reads more like the laughable Inspector Clouseau of the famed ‘Pink Panther’ series or ‘The Three Stooges’ of 1950s American movies than the military ‘genius’ that his mythology bestows upon him. Wright provides the details. “Bin Laden led the men to a promontory and spread them out among the

trees. They could see a Russian force only seventy meters away. Bin Laden called out to his men to advance, but his voice was hoarse and they didn't realize he was talking to them. He **climbed a leafless tree** so that they could hear him and **immediately drew fire**. A rocket-propelled grenade nearly knocked him out of the tree. 'It passed by me and exploded nearby,' bin Laden said in one account, 'but I was not affected by it at all – in fact, by the Grace of Allah, the Exalted, it was as though I had merely been covered by a handful of mud from the ground. I descended calmly and informed the brothers that the enemy was in the central axis and not on the left wing.'" Abu Ubaydah had obviously placed bin Laden and his men in a position in which he could do minimum harm to the operation and he had indeed played the role of the buffoon as military commander.

Wright continues. "In another retelling, bin Laden's most intense experience of combat seems less composed. 'There was a terrible battle, which ended up with me half sunk in the ground, firing at anything I could see.' Bin Laden and his men were pinned down all day by enemy mortar fire. 'I was only thirty meters from the Russians and they were trying to capture me,' he said. 'I was under bombardment but I was so peaceful in my heart that I fell asleep.' The story of bin Laden's nap is often told as evidence of his grace under fire. He may simply have fainted. He suffered from low blood pressure, which often made him light-headed. He always carried a bag of salt with him, and whenever he felt dizzy, he would wet a finger and stick it in the bag, then suck on the salt to keep his blood pressure from sinking."

"Amazingly, by five o'clock in the afternoon, the Arab forces, led by Abu Ubaydah, succeeded in outflanking the enemy. Without air support, the main body of the Soviet troops withdrew. There were only nine brothers against one hundred Russian Spetsnaz Special Forces troops, but out of sheer fright and panic in the dense forest, the Russians were unable to make out the number of brothers,' bin Laden related. 'All in all, about thirty-five Spetsnaz soldiers and officers were killed, and the rest fled...The morale of the mujahideen soared, not only in our area, but in the whole of Afghanistan.'"

"He had achieved his greatest victory immediately following his worst defeat. After the battle of the Lion's Den, Abu Ubaydah gave bin Laden a trophy from a dead Russian officer – a small Kalikov AK-74 assault rifle, with a walnut stock and a distinctive rusty red ammunition magazine that marked it as the advanced paratroop version of the weapon. In the future, it would always be on his shoulder."

The truth of the matter in this battle is revealed by Wright. "The entire action lasted three weeks. It was actually waged more by Sayyaf [the Afghan warlord] (who then took over the Lion's Den) than bin Laden, but the Arabs gained a reputation for courage and recklessness that established their legend, at least among themselves. Their guesthouses quietly reopened in Peshawar. From the Soviet perspective, the battle of the Lion's Den was a small moment in the tactical retreat from Afghanistan. In the heightened religious atmosphere among the men following bin Laden, however, there was a dizzying sense that they were living in a supernatural world, in which reality knelt before faith. For them, the encounter at the Lion's Den became the foundation of the myth that they defeated the superpower. Within a few years the entire Soviet empire fell to pieces – dead of the wound the Muslims inflicted in Afghanistan, the jihadis believed. By then they had created the **vanguard** that was to carry the battle forward. Al-Qaeda was conceived in the marriage of these assumptions: Faith is stronger than weapons or nations, and the ticket to enter the sacred zone where such miracles occur is the willingness to die." And these assumptions would lead to the infamous attack on America on 11 September 2001.

Footnotes:

- 1) Wright, Lawrence, "The Looming Tower: al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11," pp. 32, Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.
- 2) Ibid, pp. 33-35.
- 3) Ibid, pp. 36-37.

- 4) Ibid, pp, 37.
- 5) Ibid, pp. 37.
- 6) Ibid, pp. 41.
- 7) Ibid, pp. 42-44.
- 8) Ibid, pp. 47.
- 9) Ibid, pp. 50-59.
- 10) Ibid, pp. 58.
- 11) Ibid, pp. 60.
- 12) Ibid, pp. 71.
- 13) Ibid, pp. 75.
- 14) Ibid, pp. 79-80.
- 15) Ibid, pp. 94.
- 16) Ibid, pp. 95-98.
- 17) Ibid, pp. 99-104.
- 18) Ibid, pp. 105-110.
- 19) Ibid, pp. 110-120.
- 20) Bay, Austin, "Al Qaeda's Egyptian ideological origins," The Washington Times, 29 December 2006.
- 21) Ibid, Wright, pp. 115.
- 22) Ibid, Wright, pp. 118-120.