

# International media on the Afghanistan war



The Guardian

## The war Bin Laden has already won

JONATHAN FREEDLAND, October 10

JUST days into this conflict, a dread thought surfaces: what if Osama bin Laden is winning this war? The television pictures tell the opposite story. He is the frail man relying on a stick, hunted quarry chased into a cave. Ranged against him are the mightiest forces in the world, a superpower wielding multibillion-dollar weaponry, backed by a string of wealthy, well-equipped allies. Surely, as Tony Blair told the world via the Labour Party conference last week, "This is a battle with only one outcome: our victory, not theirs." That would be true if this was an ordinary war, the kind between states. If this were a battle with Iraq or Serbia, the result would be pre-ordained. But this belongs in a category all its own. The differences are obvious: Bin Laden is a leader without a country and his "troops" are disciples scattered and hidden across the globe, making a conventional attack on him impossible. To eradicate al-Qaida through an air assault is like destroying a flu virus with a sledgehammer: it cannot work. But that is only part of the difference. For this war's defining characteristic is the centrality of propaganda. What are clashing here are not two armies, but two arguments.

The US-led coalition's case is that this is not about the west vs. Islam, but the world against terror. The lead rhetorical advocate has been Tony Blair, who this week took his message to the Arab world directly via an interview with the suddenly-hot satellite TV channel, al-Jazeera. Bin Laden has been no less eloquent, presenting his case via that same TV station on the very night the bombing began. (Spin doctors the world over can only applaud the skill of his media operation: Bin Laden may be an evil terrorist, but he's clearly read the Clinton-Blair book of rapid rebuttal.) His version is the direct opposite of the one pushed by Blair and George Bush. "These events have divided the world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of infidels," he declared. For him, this is not the world against terror, but Islam against everyone else. The question immediately becomes: which version is prevailing among the people that matter - the people of the Arab and Muslim world? London and Washington insist that Arab and Muslim governments accept their view that the object of the current onslaught is the Taliban and al-Qaida and no one else. But the

people of the Muslim "street" do not seem to see it that way. For all the reassurances supplied by kings and despots, large sections of their peoples - we cannot call them electorates - have sided with Bin Laden. Indeed, they regard the current bombing offensive as utter confirmation of his key message: that America and its allies will always seek to crush poor, Muslim peoples wherever they may be.

Accordingly, they have rioted on his behalf across Pakistan, Indonesia and the Gaza strip. They have brandished his face on placards and hailed him as a champion of "the Islamic nation". So-called moderate Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, have refused to grant the US even the military cooperation they provided during the Gulf war, so fearful are they of seeming to collude with the Great Satan. In contrast with the 1991 conflict, the night war on Kabul has been conducted without the military help of a single Muslim country. Even here in Britain, Muslim leaders - despite Blair's insistent pleading that this fight has nothing to do with Islam - have refused to lend their endorsement. Blair personally wooed the secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain at Downing Street on Monday, but it made no difference: Yousuf Bhalloik still called for an immediate halt to the war. In other words, few in the Muslim world see an attack on the Afghan regime as a long-overdue assault on a barbaric dictatorship. Many, perhaps most, see it as an attack on them.

They do not denounce the Taliban and cheer their probable collapse; they see them as brothers, the newest victims of the western "crusade" to humiliate Islam. On this they agree with Osama bin Laden. The intensity of street-level reaction has exposed a glaring hole in the western coalition's case, the same hole that lay at the centre of the debate that raged here and in America after September 11 on the "clash of civilisations" theory pushed by Harvard professor Samuel Huntington. To trash the idea, Blair and others constantly said the west has no grievance with Islam. But they never paused to wonder how Islam felt about the west. Bin Laden insists there is absolutely a clash of civilisations - and, so far, from Quetta to Gaza, they're cheering him. With typical arrogance, most western thinkers assumed Huntington's thesis was all about us; we forgot about them. Our leaders have filled the gap by making assumptions about the Muslim

world. It has been comforting hearing Sheikh Anthony Charles Lynton Blair and Mullah George Walker Bush tell us Bin Laden-ism is a desecration of the peace-loving faith that is true Islam. But it would have been more reassuring if similar verdicts had come from Koranic scholars of even greater rank than the British PM and US president. There has been criticism of Bin Laden, to be sure. Yet so far neither the ayatollahs of Iran nor the grand muftis of Cairo and Jerusalem have ostracised him from on-high as an enemy of Islam - there has been no fatwa against him.

It's not difficult to understand why few of Islam's most senior clerics have condemned him as a blasphemer. Most of them are tied to governments that are fearful of sparking an Islamist revolt. But that is hardly any more comforting. For what emerges is a picture of a Muslim world where either vocal and growing minorities idolise Bin Laden or governments fear standing against him. Either position confirms the hopelessness of a western propaganda campaign to isolate him.

This prompts a bleak practical conclusion: this war is truly a no-war situation. To capture and put Bin Laden on trial would be to create a focus for Islamist anger, and to further inflame his legend. Killing him would create a martyr whose death would have to be gruesomely avenged. Alive he would carry on wreaking murderous havoc. Every option is victory for his and defeat for us.

And so even I, who hold no brief for knee-jerk anti-Americanism or knee-jerk pacifism, am left feeling deeply ambivalent about this war. I wonder if it will pass the basic, Blairite test: what's best is what works - or if it is about to make a grievous problem even worse. I worry that we may have played directly into Bin Laden's hands, flowing a script he's been dreaming up these last five years - inadvertently proving that America and Islam are locked in an epic clash of civilisations after all. I wonder if it would have been smarter to have taken out the men of the al-Qaida network one by one, quietly and in the dead of night, rather than giving Osama bin Laden this spectacular war he craves. I wonder if he is not celebrating in that cave of his - celebrating the war he has already won.

## Japan Times Pentagon eyes nuclear option

The US Defence Department has recommended to President Bush the use of tactical nuclear weapons as a military option in the Afghanistan war, sources told the Japan Times. The paper reported September 20: "Military analysts said the president is unlikely to opt for the use of nuclear weapons because doing so would generate a backlash from the international community and could even trigger revenge from the enemy involving weapons of mass destruction. However, the Pentagon's suggestion shows the determination of US officials to retaliate for the first massive terrorist attacks on the US mainland, the analysts said." The Japan Times cited "diplomatic sources" as saying "the Pentagon recommended using tactical nuclear weapons shortly after it became known that the terrorist attacks caused an unprecedented number of civilian casualties... Tactical nuclear weapons have been developed to attack very specific targets. The military analysts said Pentagon officials are apparently thinking of using weapons that can reach and destroy terrorists hiding in an underground shelter, limiting damage to surrounding areas." After the 1986 US air raid on Libya failed to kill Col. Mommur Qaddafi and the 1998 US cruise missile attack on Afghanistan failed to kill Osama bin Laden, the Pentagon began considering use of tactical nuclear weapons in such contingencies. The report also cited the September 16 broadcast of ABC TV's "This Week" programme, in which Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld refused to rule out the use of tactical nuclear weapons. Rumsfeld avoided answering a question on whether the nuclear option was under consideration, while a Pentagon official similarly replied, "We will not discuss operational and intelligence matters." Concluded the report: "The US has indicated that it does not rule out the use of nuclear weapons if a country attacks the US, its allies, or its forces with chemical or biological weapons."

## Ananova Bin Laden loves Sesame Street?

The Internet news agency Ananova reported October 1 that Islamic protesters in Pakistan and elsewhere are using posters showing the face of Osama bin Laden alongside Bert, the Sesame Street puppet. It is believed an image of Bin Laden with Bert was inadvertently downloaded from a spoof website and used on posters printed up for anti-US rallies across the Middle East and Asia. Press photographs of protests clearly show posters of Osama with a small image of Bert by his right shoulder. The AP told Ananova the photos are not doctored. The image of Bert and Bin Laden first appeared in the cult parody website "Bert is Evil." An executive for Sesame Street said: "We're outraged that our characters would be used in this unfortunate and distasteful manner. The people responsible for this should be ashamed."

## The Observer Pentagon seeking "war without limit"?

The UK Observer reported September 30 that two detailed proposals for "warfare without limit" have been presented to President Bush by Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. The proposals were drawn up by his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz - a right-wing intellectual who rose through State Department and Pentagon ranks under Ronald Reagan to become one of the chief architects of the 1991 Gulf War. The report says the plans "argue for open-ended war without constraint either of time or geography and potentially engulfing the entire Middle East and Central

Asia." The plans involve overt and "visible" military action by the 10th Mountain and 82nd Airborne divisions in Afghanistan. These would act as "cover" for units under the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command, which would operate elsewhere. These include Army Rangers, Delta Force and other elite forces. The Afghanistan covert ops would be followed by similar campaigns in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon as well as post-Soviet republics. Asked whether the Palestinian Hamas in the Occupied Territories would be too controversial a target, one source said: "Never say never." The Observer also claims the proposals "have opened up an abyss in the Bush administration, since they run counter to plans carefully laid by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who has had the upper hand against the Pentagon for the first three weeks since the disaster, but is starting to lose his commanding position within the Oval Office." Concludes the report: "The final arbiter between the Pentagon and Powell camps is likely to be Vice-President Dick Cheney. Cheney is traditionally an enemy of Powell's and a close ally of Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, but has been said to be moving closer to the Secretary of State's views over the road to war. The Observer's sources, however, indicate the reverse - that Cheney will remain with his friends and support an expansion of the war beyond Afghanistan."

## Geostrategy-Direct.com Does Osama have the nuke?

Osama Bin Laden has at least 20 nuclear weapons, according to an April report in the weekly intelligence newsletter Geostrategy-Direct.com. Bin Laden, the report said, was able to gain access to the weapons via Chechen rebels who had managed to steal them from Russian weapons depots. The newsletter quoted Russian and Arab sources, who confirmed that Bin Laden had received some "suitcase" nuclear bombs and other materials from Chechen rebels. Bin Laden had supplied the rebels with money, weapons and volunteers in their battle against Russian army forces, which has raged off-and-on since 1994. The newsletter said that whether Osama has the bomb was "no longer in doubt... The question is how many." A September 19 report in Long Island's Newsday supports the allegations. "Bin Laden has been trying to get his hands on enriched uranium for seven or eight years," Newsday quotes former CIA director James Woolsey. A former Russian intelligence official, in a memorandum to a US counterpart provided to Newsday, said Russian security forces halted a 1998 attempt to sell an unspecified amount of Soviet-origin bomb-grade uranium to a Pakistani company controlled by Bin Laden. During testimony earlier this year at the New York trial of four men accused in the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa, a defector from Bin Laden's network said he had served as a go-between in a 1993 effort to acquire a cylinder containing uranium of South African origin (described by several sources as enriched uranium-235). The defector, Jamal Ahmed al-Fadi, said he had been ordered by one of Bin Laden's lieutenants to buy the uranium from former Sudanese military officer Salah Abdel Mubruk for \$1.5 million. But Fadi said he was removed from the negotiations and never learned whether the deal went through.

## RAWA Flip side of the same coin

The "Northern Alliance" of Islamic fundamentalist factions fighting the Taliban are now being backed up by the US and UK with funds, arms and Special Forces troops. But Afghanistan's most militant pro-democracy dissident group protests this as a continuation of the same policies which led to the current disaster and "the trend of terrorism." Saima Karim, spokesperson for the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), told a press conference in Peshawar, Pakistan, that her organisation opposes the Taliban but considers the Northern

Alliance "the other side of the same coin". She called upon the world community to halt financial and political support to both factions. She added that the people of Afghanistan have nothing to do with Osama and his accomplices, and called upon the US not to unleash "vast and indiscriminate military attacks".

## Pravda Al-ManarTV Jew-haters make hay

The Internet rumour that 4,000 Jews who worked at the World Trade Centre stayed home on September 11, warned in advance of the impending attack, has actually been reported as fact by some international media outlets, including Russia's Pravda and Al-Manar TV in Beirut which cited "Arab sources" quoted in Jordan's al-Watan newspaper that the Jewish employees had all been tipped off by Israeli intelligence. The urban legends-busters at Snopes.com - while acknowledging the danger of legitimising such claptrap by answering it - have repudiated the rumour, documenting numerous press accounts of Jews who died in the attacks. The implication is that Israeli intelligence was really behind the attacks, or allowed them to happen, in order to influence world opinion against the Arabs. In fact, the UK Telegraph reported September 16 that "Israeli intelligence officials say they warned their counterparts in the United States last month that large-scale terrorist attacks on highly visible targets on the American mainland were imminent."

## WBAI Radio On terrorism or war for oil?

Anti-war activists speculate that despite the spectacular September 11 terror attacks, the hidden agenda behind President Bush's war drive is to establish a Pax Americana in Central Asia and secure the vast oil resources of the Caspian Basin. US oil companies have been negotiating with the post-Soviet republics of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan for access to the oil, but have been stymied by political instability in the region. Oil conglomerates were torn between two possible pipeline routes to Western markets: west through the war-torn Caucasus Mountains to Turkey, or south through war-torn Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Arabian Sea. New York's WBAI Radio reported September 22 that a high-ranking aide to President Bush is linked to a multinational oil company which was seeking to build the pipeline across Afghanistan. Zalmay Khalilzad, National Security Council senior director for the Persian Gulf, Southern Asia and Other Regional Issues, was formerly employed as a consultant by Unocal, which was involved in the Afghan pipeline project until late 1998. On December 5, 1998, the New York Times reported on the proposed Afghan pipeline: "When Unocal joined the project in 1995, it was viewed by many analysts as the most audacious gambit of the 1990's oil rush in the Caspian... There was to have been a 1,005-mile oil pipeline and a companion 918-mile natural gas pipeline, in addition to a tanker loading terminal in Pakistan's Arabian Sea port of Gwadan... The company projected annual revenues of \$2 billion, or enough to recover the cost of the project in five years... Unocal opened offices in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan. To help it sell the project to the many governments involved, Unocal hired senior United States diplomats like the former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger... Problems began with the Taliban's capture of the Afghan capital, Kabul, in September 1996. Unocal initially took a positive view of the movement's triumph."

Compiled by Bill Weinberg, Source: Internet

The New York Times

## Slaughter of the innocent bolsters view that this is war against Islam

ROBERT FISK, October 15

IN Baghdad we had the bunker where our missile died more than 300 people to freedom. In Kosovo we had a refugee column torn to pieces by our bombs. Now in Afghanistan, a village called Karam is our latest massacre. Of course its time for that tame old word "regret". We regretted the Baghdad bunker. We were really very sorry for the refugee slaughter in Kosovo. Now we are regretting the bomb that went astray in Kabul on Friday night, the missile that killed the four UN mine clearers last Monday; and whatever hit Karam.

It's always the same story. We start shooting with "smart" weapons after our journalists and generals have told us of their sophistication. Their press conferences produce monochrome snapshots of bloodless airbase runways with little holes

sprinkled across the apron. "A successful night," they used to say, after bombing Serbia.

They said that again last week and no one - until of course we splatter civilians - suggests going to war involves killing innocent people. It does. That is why the military invented that repulsive and morally shameful phrase "collateral damage". And they are always ready to smear the reporters on the ground. At first, Nato claimed its aircraft had not butchered the refugee convoy in April 1999. Once we found the bomb parts, with US markings, they changed their tune. The new tune went like this: "If we killed the innocent we regret it, but why don't the reporters 'break free' of their Serb minders and see what else is going on in Kosovo?" We might be asked the same again, now we are involved in what, historically, is for us in Britain the Fourth Afghan War.

What are we journalists doing giving succour to Mr bin Laden and his thugs? There is one big difference this time round. In 1991, we had a real Muslim coalition on our side. In 1999, we so bestialised the Serbs that the death of their innocent civilians could be laid at the hands of Slobodan Milosevic, and anyway - in theory at least - we were trying to save the Albanian Muslims. No doubt some idiot general will tell us this time round that Karam is Mr bin Laden's fault - idiot, because this is not going to wash with the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who are outraged at our air strikes on Afghanistan. And here's the rub. In every Middle Eastern country, even tolerant Lebanon, suspicion is growing that this is a war against Islam.

That is why the Arab leaders are mostly silent and why the Saudis don't want to help us. That is why

crowds tried yesterday to storm a Pakistani airbase used by the American forces. It reveals a dislocation of thought among Arabs about the crimes against humanity in New York and Washington, a disturbing disconnection that allows them to condemn the atrocities in America without reference to America's response - and condemn the response without reflecting on the carnage on the other side of the Atlantic. The Muslim world now sees innocent Muslims who have died in Western air strikes on Afghanistan. If Karam turns out to be as terrible as the Taliban claims, all of Mr Blair's lectures and denials that this is a religious war will be in vain. The Prime Minister can now only reflect upon the irony that an obscurantist sect that smashes television sets and hangs videotapes from trees is now using television and videotape for its own propaganda.

The Independent

## The forgotten Muslim victims of September 11

DAVID USBORNE, October 11

THE United States and Britain face the unavoidable risk, as they continue their bombardment of Afghanistan, that sometimes their missiles will crash into the wrong targets. Buildings with no military significance will be flattened, and, worse, perfectly innocent lives will be ended. We call it collateral damage.

When the terrorists, on the other hand, drove their hijacked jets into the twin towers, in New York, and the Pentagon, outside Washington, DC, the world was numbed by the efficacy of their daring. One aircraft went down in the fields of Pennsylvania; the other three scored bull's-eyes. Yet the collateral damage on 11 September was massive. Here are a few names. Samad Afridi, Omar Namoo, Asad Samir, Yusuf Saad, Talat Hussain, Azam Ahsan, Qasim Ali Khan, Naseema Simjee, Ashraf Ahmad Babu, Mohammad Chaudhury, Jumma Haque.

There are many more. All of them died in those attacks on America, and all were Muslims. Many were working in the World Trade Centre. Some were among the heroes who rushed to the scene to help the wounded, only to be crushed themselves. At least two were passengers on the aircraft. Why have we not heard more about the Muslim victims of the horror in America? In Britain, we witnessed a brief and sometimes bitter debate over whether Muslim leaders had said enough to condemn the terrorists' actions. But perversely, it was cast once again in terms of Islam vs. America, or Islam vs. Christianity - the same terms used by al-Qaida in its latest call to all Muslims to join its war on Britain and America. Yet Islam is in Britain and America. Someone should have distributed that list of names.

Dr Mansoor Khan is a family doctor in Queens, New York, who opened a bereavement centre for Pakistani relatives of the victims of the twin towers tragedy. He theorises that the media are at fault because they have barely made mention of the Muslim victims who died on that terrible Tuesday. They have ducked that reality because it gets in the way of a

central convenience: that it was a them-against-us crime, and is now a them-against-us war. "At the same time saying that Muslims are victims of the atrocity and that we are the perpetrators of it? I think that is hard for them to swallow," he offers.

Then there are the numbers. The media shy away from anything confusing. And there is, sadly, great confusion over how many Muslims were killed in the raids on America. The news network CNN, for example, will tell you that the number of Pakistanis who perished is 200. That is huge. Hasn't anyone told that to the demonstrators on the streets of Quetta and Islamabad? Yet here in New York, the list of those killed compiled by the Pakistani mission to the United Nations has nine names only. The Muslim Parliament in Britain has said that 1,500 Muslims of all nationalities died in the attacks. The Council on American Islamic Relations, in Washington, said 800. Make up your minds, guys.

Take an interest, perhaps, in Salman Hamdani, a laboratory technician, who left his family home in Queens on 11 September to go to work at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, at the Rockefeller Centre, in Manhattan. He took the No 7 elevated subway train, as usual, but on that day he didn't return. Just 23 years old, he was trained in emergency medical assistance. As far as anyone can guess, he took it on himself to climb aboard an ambulance headed for the World Trade Centre after the first of the planes hit. (He never even got to his office.) His training gave him reason to go close to the towers; perhaps he even went inside one of them. Their rubble became his tomb. And so the terrorists killed Salman, too, a young Muslim man born in Karachi, Pakistan. He came to America with his family when he was just one year old and still lived in the traditional Pakistani and Muslim home of his parents and two younger brothers, in the Bayside section of Queens. Talat, his mother, teaches English to young teenagers; his father, Salim, owns a small shop. It is a home where Islam plays a large role. An English version of the Koran is always on the living-room table. A sacred Islamic text is stuck to the fridge. Salman - his family called him Sal - was private about his faith, but serious, too.

He read the Koran and prayed five times a day. How will the terrorists justify that death? Quite easily, perhaps, because Salman loved not only Islam but also the country they hated. As a teenager, he worshipped the Star Wars films, and he had never really grown out of the fascination. His navy-blue Honda Civic had personalised licence plates that said: "Young Jedi". He was studying for a master's degree part-time at New York University, and his ambition was to be a doctor. He was planning also to move to Manhattan, an island of life and creativity that he could not resist. "He is an American," Talat Hamdani said of her son some days after the tragedy. "He likes reading science-fiction books and playing video games." Salman, a well-built young man, was also on his high school's American football team.

Or consider the grief of Zara Khan, who for more than a week after the Trade Centre attacks roamed the streets of Manhattan, giving out small sheets of paper to anyone who would take them. They showed a photograph of her 29-year-old brother, Taimour Khan, and a phone number. "Please call," the flyer said. Zara spoke to hundreds of people in those desperate days. She sought out journalists and held up the flyer for the television cameras. But, like almost 5,000 others in the Trade Centre, Taimour was gone.

He, too, came from a Pakistani and Muslim household. Unlike Salman, Taimour was born in the US and considered himself American above all. He not only played football in his school, in a comfortable Long Island suburb where the Khans were the only Pakistani family; he was the captain of the team. His upbringing was secular Muslim, and as a young man, Taimour was barely observant of Islam. He had already made the move to Manhattan, where, by all accounts, his charm and good looks made him a popular man and a regular of the night-club scene. According to his relatives, however, Taimour always identified himself not just as an American but also as a Muslim. And he never forgot the emphasis that Islam gives to the family. "Nearly every week, he would come by to see his mother," noted an uncle, Arshad Khan. "He would never let her cook. He would always take her to the best restaurants."

angry Americans. The Council on American Islamic Relations has recorded 1,500 hate crimes against Muslims in the US since the attacks.

There is another problem. According to Muhammad Tariqur Rahman, of the Islamist Circle of North America, Muslim families are holding back from making missing-persons reports, depriving themselves of financial benefits, because of immigration concerns: "There were a lot of illegal aliens working in restaurants or subway news-stands, and these people are not coming forward with information about those who died, for fear that they may be deported." Even if the victim may have been in the US legally, with a green card, families are still nervous. Mr Rahman has his own list of 40 Pakistanis missing since the tragedy. His best guess for the total number of Muslims killed is around 150. His organisation has been investing in advertisements in ethnic newspapers in New York and even spots on Urdu-language television, urging people to step forward. But the response has been minimal.

The Muslim victims of the terror of 11 September are the forgotten victims. They are easily forgotten, because so many don't even have names. And it has been convenient for both sides to forget them. We need now to hold up the stories of Salman, Taimour and Rahma. And we should recite out loud the list of Muslim names that we do have. Because in days as dangerous as these, they tell us many things. This is not a clash of civilisations and certainly not a clash of religions. Some Muslims feel it is their duty to join the cause of al-Qaida and its leader, Osama bin Laden, or at least to express sympathy for it. But Muslims have been victims of al-Qaida, too. And if it strikes again, in London or New York, Muslims will be victims again.

Al-Qaida holds America as the enemy and the infidel. But America is a country with seven million Muslims. The largest group of whom, by the way, is made up of African-Americans. "Everyone is affected, no matter what religion you are," Haleema Salie, the mother of Rahma Salie, said of the attacks on New York. Simply put. Very important. The Taliban tell us this is a holy war. They are wrong, because there are Muslims on both sides.