



Osama's unmistakable message

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In his last audiotape, aired at the discretion of al Jazeera a few days ago, the lord of al Qaeda seemed to be trying to score many points, using new editorial tactics and addressing more than one audience. His prepared speech seemed more a state of jihad address than a specific threat to America, although sounding very menacing. So what was the message really about?

As of September, the jihadi chat rooms have asked if "we are we winning the war on the infidels?" The mentors of the rooms have tried to reassure the participants that all was going fine, referring to the letters between Ayman al Zawahiri and Abu Musab al Zarqawi. But 2005 left a lot of explaining for the jihadists in the region: elections in Afghanistan with millions of women voting and being elected; two elections and one referendum in Iraq: A Cedar Revolution in Beirut

and debates about democracy raging on the Internet.

Despite car bombs, assassinations, massacres, kidnapping and videotapes on al Jazeera and beyond, the jihadists weren't going anyway. Young people in the Arab and Middle East region are turning increasingly to freedom, contradicting the ideological speeches of al Qaeda and its sisters in the region. Blood alone was not bringing victory to the jihadists.

Hence the master had to strike from his cave. The bottom line of the audio is simple: We, as jihadists, are winning the war; they, American and other infidels, are losing it. Reverberated by al Jazeera in a thoroughly prepared script: The news of the tape's existence gradually leaked to other news agencies that aired fragments first, followed instantly by a panel of well-prepared "ex-

perts" to "explain the document" and educate the masses about it. In a few hours, Web sites made it available with all the analyses and simplifications.

"We are devastating your forces in Iraq" declared bin Laden, but "your president is hiding the facts." A first salvo in a psychological war aimed at minimizing the trust inside the "enemy homeland," thought the speechwriters of bin Laden. Indeed, the Arabic language and the concepts used in this audio indicate that jihadi eyes and ears, very attentive to the Western and American political process, seemed to be feeding the construction of the text.

"The morale of the U.S. troops is fading, and your government is attempting to suppress your media, including al Jazeera," said bin Laden. It was the first time al Qaeda's leader mentioned the channel directly. Penetrating America's political culture, bin Laden railed over the presidential "victorious" landing on the aircraft carrier, and used U.S. polls as evidence that the United States was on the verge of a world policy collapse.

Then he threatened with upcoming operations inside the United States. Referring to the London model, he hinted at a second-generation al Qaeda, citizens potentially awaiting his instructions and moving at will

when preparedness allowed. He wanted to show his troops that the "final weapons are being readied," as Hitler used to promise his military. But even if bin Laden is shooting in the dark, jihadist ears, indoctrinated by Wahhabi money and ideology, are indeed listening: They are preparing a future jihad.

Then he offered a truce. Speaking as a caliph, al Qaeda's boss said he will suspend operations if the United States apologizes and withdraws from all Muslim lands. Some sympathizers ran on media airwaves to "assure the Western public" of the good intentions of bin Laden. "He will deliver" said one of them on BBC. "See how Spain saved itself from strikes after the withdrawal from Iraq."

But what the public ignores about the "hudna" (cease-fire) offered by bin Laden is that the international community, and the United States, will have to recognize al Qaeda as the representative of the Muslim world. In short, that all Muslim governments would elevate bin Laden as the world caliph -- hence he will be able to "resume" the jihad after the hudna is over, since it is only a truce after all. The world, thus, would be divided in two spheres, with Osama as emperor from Morocco to China, with his full sovereign control of the resources, that is oil, and the nuclear toys of Pakistan.

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