

### **Osama bin Laden: Early Life**

Osama bin Laden was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 1957 or 1958. He was the 17th of 52 children born to Mohammed bin Laden, a Yemeni immigrant who owned the largest construction company in the Saudi kingdom. Young Osama had a privileged upbringing. His siblings were educated in the West and went to work for his father's enormously wealthy company, but Osama bin Laden stayed close to home. He went to school in Jiddah, married young and, like many Saudi men, joined the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood started as a religious social organization; preaching Islam, teaching the illiterate, setting up hospitals and even launching commercial enterprises. As it continued to rise in influence, starting in 1936, it began to oppose British rule in Egypt and over time became more and more anti-west (including America).

### **Osama bin Laden: The Pan-Islamist Idea**

For bin Laden, Islam was more than just a religion: It shaped his political beliefs and influenced every decision he made. While he was at college in the late 1970s, he became a follower of the radical pan-Islamist scholar Abdullah Azzam, who believed that all Muslims should rise up in jihad, or holy war, to create a single Islamic state. This idea appealed to the young bin Laden, who resented what he saw as a growing Western (America and Europe) influence on Middle Eastern life (For example, the western world has at different time controlled and/or sought control of different areas within the Middle East, their

customs, language, religions, militaries and ways of life have been influencing the world as we know it).

In 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan; soon afterward, Azzam and bin Laden traveled to Peshawar, a Pakistani city on the border with Afghanistan, to join the resistance. They did not become fighters themselves, but they used their extensive connections to win financial and moral support for the Afghan rebels). They also encouraged young men to come from all over the Middle East to join the resistance, and over time developed a global recruitment network--with offices in places as far away as Brooklyn and Tucson, Arizona--and provided the migrant soldiers, known as "Afghan Arabs," with training and supplies. Most important, it showed bin Laden and his associates that it was possible to put pan-Islamism into practice, bringing Muslim from all over the world together in a united cause.

### **Osama Bin Laden: Building Al-Qaida**

In 1988, bin Laden created a new group, called al-Qaida ("the base") that would focus on symbolic acts of terrorism instead of military campaigns. After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia to step up fundraising for this new and more complicated mission. However, the comparatively pro-Western Saudi royal family feared that bin Laden's fiery pan-Islamist speech might cause trouble in the kingdom, and so they tried to keep him as quiet as they could. Saudi Arabia took away his passport and denied his offer to send "Afghan

Arabs" to guard the border after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Then, adding insult to injury, they sought help from the "infidel" U.S. instead. Osama bin Laden was furious about being snubbed and Saudi Arabia choosing America over his al-Qaida network. He vowed al-Qaeda and not the Americans, who would one day prove to be "master of this world."