

Bin Laden Issues Warning on Iraq, Israel

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In New Audiotape to Unify al Qaeda

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CAIRO, Egypt -- Osama bin Laden warned Iraq's Sunni Arabs against fighting al Qaeda and promised to expand the terror group's holy war to Israel in a new audiotape Saturday, threatening "blood for blood, destruction for destruction."

Most of the 56-minute tape dealt with Iraq, apparently al Qaeda's latest attempt to keep supporters in Iraq unified at a time when the U.S. military claims to have al Qaeda's Iraq branch on the run.

The tape did not mention Pakistan or the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, though Pakistan's government has blamed al Qaeda and the Taliban for her death on Thursday.

But Mr. bin Laden's comments offered an unusually direct attack on Israel, which has warned of growing al Qaeda activity in Palestinian territory. The terror network is not believed to have taken a strong role there so far.

"We intend to liberate Palestine, the whole of Palestine from the (Jordan) river to the sea," he said, threatening "blood for blood, destruction for destruction."

"We will not recognize even one inch for Jews in the land of Palestine as other Muslim leaders have," Mr. bin Laden said.

In Iraq, a number of Sunni Arab tribes in western Anbar province have formed a coalition fighting al Qaeda-linked insurgents that U.S. officials credit for deeply reducing violence in the province. The U.S. military has been working to form similar "Awakening Councils" in other areas of Iraq.

White House spokesman Tony Fratto said Mr. bin Laden's tape shows that al Qaeda's aim is to block democracy and freedom for all Iraqis.

"It also reminds us that the mission to defeat al Qaeda in Iraq is critically important and must succeed," Mr. Fratto said. "The Iraqi people -- every day, and in increasing numbers -- are choosing freedom and standing against the murderous, hateful ideology of AQI. And we stand with them."

In the audiotape, Mr. bin Laden denounced Abdul-Sattar Abu Risha, the former leader of the Anbar Awakening Council, who was killed in a September bombing claimed by al Qaeda.

"The most evil of the traitors are those who trade away their religion for the sake of their mortal life," Mr. bin Laden said.

Mr. bin Laden said U.S. and Iraqi officials are seeking to set up a "national unity government" joining the country's Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

"Our duty is to foil these dangerous schemes, which try to prevent the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq, which would be a wall of resistance against American schemes to divide Iraq," he said.

The authenticity of the tape could not be independently confirmed. But the voice resembled that of Mr. bin Laden. The tape was posted on an Islamic militant Web site where al Qaeda's media arm, Al-Sahab, issues the group's messages.

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