

Messages to the World - The Statements of Osama bin Laden.  
Edited and Introduced by Bruce Lawrence. Verso 2006.

The Osama bin Laden I Know - An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader  
by Peter L. Bergen. Free Press 2006.

We have all become used to seeing excerpts of the sporadic videos shown on al Jazeera TV from Osama bin Laden, and hearing about his taped messages, but few of us in the West have had the opportunity of hearing what he says in any detail, let alone reading his words: *Messages to the World* now fills that gap and does so in a most fascinating way.

Here, collected in one volume, are the pronouncements of bin Laden from 1994-2004, divided into five sections: From Sudan, In Khurasan, Towards 9/11, War in Afghanistan, War in Iraq. Here one may find all of the obsessions of the world's most wanted man: Palestine, the state of the Islamic *umma*, the Jews, America and its 'crusader' allies, the Saudi regime and its corruption. What emerges, apart from the rather turgid prose, is the level of hatred and loathing that permeates the thought of this supposedly pious man, and the apparent lack of awareness of the dichotomy that exists between expressing his hatreds in the name of a compassionate and merciful God. Nevertheless, if it is a truism that one needs to 'know one's enemy' this is as good a means of doing so as one could wish to find.

*The Osama bin Laden I Know*, by the author of the excellent *Holy War Inc.*, Peter L. Bergen, a journalist who met bin Laden before he became infamous, takes a very different approach to its subject. In the course of 14 chapters tracing Bin Laden's life and 'career' Bergen quotes from a large number of individuals who have known or been close to Osama, sometimes tiny quotes, others lengthier vignettes. Each section is soundly and informally editorialised by the author in a manner that elucidates the material that follows.

This is a further valuable contribution to the hagiography of a man who dominates the 21<sup>st</sup> century and gives information that in some cases undermines and at others feeds the myth.

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