



Glenn Greenwald: “Yes, You Should Read Bin Laden's TikTok-Viral "Letter to America"”

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): We didn't, though, focus on this question: Why did this happen? Why did they hate us? We couldn't figure it out. People who live in the United States believe and are told in our talk that we are a nice, good, benevolent, democratic, free country. We don't want to bother anybody in the world. We're not here to conquer anyone. To the extent that we involve ourselves in the world, it's to help like we're doing now in Ukraine, we're told, just want to spread democracy. We want to defend people. Well, like a really nice, benevolent uncle. So why would anybody possibly want to perpetrate an attack on the United States, that brutality and savagery? Americans rightly wanted to know. And they were fed a complete bullshit answer; by neocons, by the media, by the government. They hate us for our freedoms. And one of the amazing things was that, as I said, there were all these interviews with Osama bin Laden, all the speeches he had given, where he laid out the real reasons why people in that part of the world hated the United States. And yet after 9/11, the US government instructed television networks ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, Fox: Do not show any speeches or interviews with Osama bin Laden. Because they didn't want the American population hearing from him what their actual grievances were. They didn't want Americans to think that maybe we had done things in that part of the world that caused it to happen, that caused this blowback, to use the CIA's term. And so they cause bin Laden's interviews to be censored through this moronic excuse that they gave to the networks that were concerned he may have some secret code that he uses in the interview, some magic phrase, some gesture, like he twinkles his nose like the witch in Bewitched used to do, or like rubs his ear, that will activate sleeper cells in the United States as a signal to attack. That was their excuse given as to why these networks shouldn't show anything from Osama bin Laden. And they obeyed. They obeyed.

Americans never got to hear from the people they were told were responsible for 9/11, about why they attacked. It just was kept from us. A country that has a free press, free speech. And in its place we got this narrative, they hate us for our freedoms. And yet in 2002, the person accused of having perpetrated that attack, Osama bin Laden, wrote a letter that he entitled "Letter to America". He was trying to communicate directly to the American people. And to outline in detail the specific policies the United States had undertaken that interfered in and brought violence to and despoils despotism to that part of the world as the real reason why people in that part of the world hate the United States and want to bring violence back. And why they view it as an attack on the United States, but a self-defence of their lands and their families. And obviously it doesn't mean Osama bin Laden was telling the truth and anything he was saying doesn't mean 9/11 was justified, obviously. But if you're in a war and you're radically transforming your own country in its name, the way we did with the Patriot Act and the NSA spying and the rest, and you're fighting all sorts of wars and bombing people all around the world in the name of this war, of course, we should understand what the actual views are of the other side rather than just listening to our government media that keeps that from us on purpose so they can feed us a propagandistic line that is way more flattering to them, that keeps the population in line. And that's what happened.

This 2002 letter from bin Laden was not very widely discussed at the time. Most Americans, I guarantee you, don't know about it. Didn't know about it. Even adults who were paying attention. In fact, a journalist friend of mine who was in media at the time had a prominent media job, told me they did not know about this letter until this week. That amazes me. But that's true. Because the media did such a good job of suppressing it. One of the very few places that actually contains this letter where the letter was posted was on The Guardian website. And for whatever reasons, a bunch of young Americans started to find this letter and talk about it among themselves and say, Oh my God, there's this letter from Osama bin Laden in 2002 purporting to explain why the 9/11 attack happened. And one of the things he said was that part of the reason why people in that part of the world hate the United States is because of the perception that we're responsible for Israeli attacks on the Palestinians. And we've talked on our show over the last five weeks about how that is undoubtedly true. The State Department has issued multiple warnings, multiple advisories to American citizens who are travelling, that they face a significantly increased and heightened threat of attack; terrorist attack, anti-American attack. Because people are so angry at the United States for supporting this Israeli war. In other words, presumably our foreign policy is supposed to be about enhancing the security of American citizens, but our support for Israel in this case, according to the State Department that supports this policy, has instead made it more likely we are to be violently attacked if we travel outside the United States anywhere in the world.

And so a lot of young Americans who didn't know this about 9/11 where Al Qaeda were shocked to discover it. And they began talking about it on Twitter, but mostly on Tik Tok, on Facebook, on Twitter and Instagram, mostly on Tik Tok, where young people tend to be more so than those other platforms. And it went mega viral because so many people were shocked

to learn of it and its contents. Here's an article from The New York Times about what happened there: Videos About Bin Laden's Criticism of U.S. Surge in Popularity on TikTok. These are the videos of Osama bin Laden that network news, all major network news outlets refused to air. But these videos that The New York Times describes are videos made by Tik Tok users, American Tik Tok users discussing this udder. That's what went viral.

Quote, "These videos discuss a letter the former Al Qaeda leader wrote in 2002, in which he defended the Sept. 11th attacks and said Americans had become, quote, 'servants to Jews'." "The letter titled 'Letter to America' was published a year after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11th, that were orchestrated by Bin Laden. He defended the attacks in New York and Washington and said Americans have become, quote, 'servants to Jews', who we said control the country's economy and media. American taxpayers, he wrote, were complicit in harming Muslims in the Middle East, including destroying Palestinian homes. Some TikTok users said this week that they view the document as an awakening to America's role in global affairs and expressed their disappointment in the United States. One popular video showed a TikTok user brushing her hair with the caption, quote, 'When you read Osama bin Laden's Letter to America and you realise you've been lied to your whole entire life'. One video with nearly 100,000 likes showed a TikTok user at her kitchen sink with the caption, quote, Trying to go back to life as normal. After reading Osama bin Laden's Letter to America and realising everything we learned about the Middle East, 9/11, and 'terrorism' was a lie. In a video with more than 60,000 views, another user said the letter showed her that America was a, quote, 'plague on the entire world'. Early Thursday, a search for, quote, #lettertoamerica showed videos with 14.2 million views. By midday, as TikTok sought to block the content, searches on the site for, quote, 'osama bin laden', 'bin laden letter' and 'osama letter' and the hashtag, quote, #lettertoamerica yielded no results on the 'videos' tab of TikTok, though some videos were still viewable with some digging."

Do I even need to point out, first of all, that conservatives who have been complaining viciously for the last seven years about big tech censorship applauded TikTok's decision not to allow a discussion of this historical document on that platform, I don't need to point that out, right? You already know that a lot of conservatives as of five weeks ago became censorship advocates in the name of protecting Israel. But this is exactly what happened after 9/11. They did not want the Americans to hear from al Qaeda, from bin Laden, from people in the Muslim world about why they were so anti-American, because to do so would make people start wondering, why are we in that part of the world? Why do we bomb it so often? And why are we sending so much money to fuel wars there? Why do we support so many dictators in that region and overthrow their governments? And they might even start wondering if I lived in a country and I knew there were some foreign power imposing a dictator on me or bombing my wedding parties or my fellow citizens and killing them, or giving bombs to people to kill people like me, I probably hate that foreign power as well. Wouldn't you?

There is an actual war between the United States and people in the Muslim world, but this was censored in our free country. Nobody knew about this letter. The government all but prohibited anybody from hearing from bin Laden. And yet Tik Tok saw the effect it was having. It's a dangerous letter, obviously. That's why it was banned after 9/11 and suppressed and buried. And that's why TikTok is now doing everything possible to ban it again. I know a lot of people have been convinced by the Obama administration that Tik Tok is some sort of arm of the Chinese Communist Party and it's there to propagandise on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party and to censor in order to propagandise Americans. Tik Tok actually is petrified of being booted out of the United States. The Biden administration has repeatedly threatened Tik Tok. The CIA, the FBI, Homeland Security, want to ban Tik Tok. The reason is, as we saw from the Twitter files, as we've seen from everything else, the US security state can control every other big tech platform. They were able to dictate to Facebook, to Instagram, to YouTube, to Twitter before Elon Musk, which content could be heard and which content couldn't. Tik Tok was the one bastion where they couldn't control. And so they told TikTok, We're going to ban you, not because it's an arm of the Chinese Communist Party, but because it's the one platform that wasn't subject to the rule of the US security state. And Tik Tok in response said, We don't care about political messaging. We just want to make money. We want to stay in the United States. And if it means turning over our censorship and content moderation processes to you, the US government, we will be happy to do it. These are capitalists who own Tik Tok. They want to make money. And that's what they have done.

We, our show, had our videos banned from Tik Tok that were critical of the CIA and its involvement in Brazil; it went viral and it got banned. Because it was critical of the CIA. Do you think the Chinese Communist Party would want to censor videos critical of the CIA? We had another video critical of President Zelensky that also got banned and taken down. Because Tik Tok has now as a condition for staying in the United States, agreed to censor in accordance with the dictates of the US government, which is why Tik Tok immediately acted to ban access to this bin Laden letter. The problem is for people who wanted this letter to be banned, everybody had the link to the letter which was on The Guardian's website. And so The Guardian incredibly, on its own or at the behest of somebody decided to ban it.

This is what you now see if you click on what had been a viral link to the 2002 Osama bin Laden letter. This is what everybody was reading. And now when you click on the link, look, what this says. I mean, if this isn't an avatar of what American journalism has become, I don't know what is. So you go there and it says Removed: document. This page previously displayed a document containing in translation the full text of Osama bin Laden's Letter to the American People, which was reported on in The Observer – that's the sister paper of The Guardian – on Sunday, November 24th, 2002. The document, which was published here on the same day, was removed on 15 November 20th, 23, So it was up on Sunday, November 24th, 2002, almost exactly 21 years ago, and then it was removed on November 15th, 2023, because people were becoming too interested in it; in connection with Israel's war with Gaza and the US support for Israel. The transcript published on our website has been widely shared

on social media without the full context. Therefore, we decided to take it down and direct readers instead to the news article that originally contextualised it.

What does that mean, the full context? The full context – the letter is the context. The letter lays out exactly what it's doing in saying. Here, by the way, are the most viewed articles on The Guardian. At one point this was the most viewed – this is a day later or so, November 16th and there you see the second most read article on The Guardian's website is one that they removed voluntarily, apparently. Removed: document. Is that Orwellian or Kafkaesque enough for you? The article in which people had the most interest in reading was one that The Guardian, precisely because people were too interested in it, decided to remove so that people could not read it any longer. It's a document by a major historical figure. The person, we're told, was responsible for the 9/11 attack, explaining to Americans why people in that part of the world were angry enough with America to do that. And The Guardian decided that even though it had been up on their website for 21 years, that now that people were discussing it in connection with the war in Israel or the war in Gaza from Israel and US support for it, you can no longer read it. Removed. Sorry, can't read that.

Here are a few excerpts of what had been the letter on the Guardian's website for a long time, for 21 years, until they decided to remove it. There you see the headline. Full text: bin Laden's 'letter to America'. Now, that's what gives the lie to The Guardian's excuse for why they removed it, that it wasn't contextualised. They had the full letter. What's not contextualised is the Guardian article. That just singled out particular parts that Guardian editors decided people should know. This is actually the full letter. This is contextualised by definition.

And this is bin Laden saying why people wanted to attack the United States. There's a subheadline, quote, "Online document: the full text of Osama bin Laden's quote, letter to the American people", reported in today's Observer. The letter first appeared on the Internet in Arabic and has since been translated and circulated by Islamist in Britain". And here's what part of the letter said about why so many Muslims wanted to attack the United States. You'll see it wasn't for our freedom. "A) You attacked us in Palestine: (i) Palestine, which has sunk under military occupation for more than 80 years. The British handed over Palestine with your help and your support to the Jews who have occupied it for more than 50 years; years overflowing with oppression, tyranny, crimes, killing, expulsion, destruction and devastation. The creation and continuation of Israel is one of the greatest crimes, and you are the leaders of its criminals. And of course, there is no need to explain and prove the degree of American support for Israel. The creation of Israel is a crime which must be erased. Each and every person whose hands have become polluted in the contribution toward this crime must pay its price and pay for it heavily."

Now, again, let me emphasise again the point of this letter, is not to show it to people because everything in it should be believed. It's to shed historical light and relevant current light on what generates anti-American sentiment in that region. Because Americans were fed a lie

about why people in that part of the world wanted to come and attack us, just like the people on Tik Tok are saying: I was fed a lie my whole life about why 9/11 happened.

B) You attacked us in Somalia; you supported the Russian atrocities against us in Chechnya, the Indian oppression against us in Kashmir, and the Jewish aggression against us in Lebanon. C) Under your supervision, consent and orders, the governments of our countries which act as your agents – so there they're saying they know that the leaders of Middle Eastern countries that act as your agents attack us on a daily basis. They're talking about these dictators under whose rule they live because the United States went around removing democratically elected leaders in the Middle East who gave too much force to the wishes and beliefs and sentiments of their people and said, You can't have democracy here. If you have democracy here, the people are anti-American, they're anti-Israeli. We can't have that. You need a dictator that we're going to impose on you. And a lot of Americans don't know that, but the people in these countries do. They know who to blame for those dictators. E) Your forces occupy our countries; you spread your military bases throughout them; you corrupt our lands and you besiege our sanctities, to protect the security of the Jews and to ensure the continuity of your pillage of our treasures. F) You have starved the Muslims of Iraq, where children die every day. It is a wonder that more than 1.5 million Iraqi children have died as a result of your sanctions, and you did not show concern. Yet when 3000 of your people died, the entire world rises and has not sat down. Is it in any way rational to expect that after America has attacked us for more than half a century, that we will then leave her to live in security and peace?!! 3) You may just then dispute that all the above does not justify aggression against civilians, for crimes they do not commit and offences in which they did not partake; but this argument contradicts your continuous repetition that America is the land of freedom and its leaders in this world. Therefore, the American people are the ones who chose their government by way of their own free will; a choice which stems from their agreement to its policies. Thus, the American people have chosen, consented to, and affirmed their support for the Israeli oppression of Palestinians, the occupation and usurpation of their land, and its continuous killing, torture, punishment and expulsion of the Palestinians. The American people have the ability and choice to refuse the policies of their government and even to change it if they want.

Now, this is why we've been trying to point out repeatedly since October 7th, that the people, the Israel supporters who are saying, that it's justified to take military action in Gaza that result in the death of so many innocent Gazans civilians is justified because those guys and civilians voted for Hamas and therefore bear the burden of responsibility for the crimes committed by Hamas. As we've been trying to say over and over, this is Osama bin Laden's theory for why civilians are fair game for being targeted. Although as immoral as it is, it applies a lot more in a functioning democracy like the United States, where Americans get to vote every two years and then for president every four years, than it does to say Russia, where I heard the same thing about why Russian civilians are responsible for Putin, because they don't overthrow him, even though we're always told that it's a totalitarian regime and

people are killed for opposing Putin. And it certainly applies to the United States more than Gaza, where they haven't had an election since 2005. And in that election, Hamas got 41% of the vote, the Palestinian Authority's party got 35% of the vote or something like that, which means that a tiny portion of the current Gaza population actually voted for Hamas the last time there was an election. This theory comes from Osama bin Laden, though, that civilians become fair game if they elect their leaders, who then commit crimes. That's what Osama bin Laden was saying. You may object to what we're saying by saying, okay, maybe the US government did all these bad things, but how does that justify killing civilians? And his answer was, as I just read you: Well, you voted for these leaders, you must agree with those policies and therefore we can hold you responsible for them.

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