

Bin Laden Tells Militants to Fight in Sudan

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WASHINGTON, April 24 — A new audiotape from [Osama bin Laden](#) urges militants to travel to Sudan to fight against a proposed [United Nations](#) force for Darfur, and he accuses the United States and its European allies of waging "a Zionist-crusader war on Islam."

Mr. bin Laden is also calling for a worldwide Muslim boycott of American products, apparently based on the boycott of Danish goods that followed a Danish newspaper's publication there of cartoons of the prophet Muhammad.

The White House said today that it believed the voice on the tape was in fact that of Mr. bin Laden, news agencies reported. This would be the first tape in three months from the [Al Qaeda](#) leader, who is believed to be hiding in the rugged region along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The tape was played today by the Arab satellite television network Al Jazeera.

When reporters traveling with President Bush in California asked the White House spokesman, [Scott McClellan](#), about the tape, he said, "The Al Qaeda leadership is on the run and under a lot of pressure."

The tape was made this year, since it refers to Western countries' cutting off money to the [Hamas](#)-led Palestinian government. Hamas came to power in Jan. 25 Palestinian elections. Al Jazeera had the tape long enough to prepare a substantial commentary, The Associated Press said.

"The blockade which the West is imposing on the government of Hamas proves that there is a Zionist crusader war on Islam," Mr. bin Laden said on the tape.

"This war is the joint responsibility of the people and the governments. While the war continues, the people renew their allegiance to their rulers and politicians and continue to

send their sons to our countries to fight us, and they continue their financial and moral support while our countries are burned and our houses are bombed and our people are killed."

Al Qaeda is not thought to have direct connections to Hamas, although both groups call for the destruction of Israel.

The taped statement was also critical of a peace agreement in Sudan aimed at ending a 21-year civil war. Mr. bin Laden was based in Sudan before being expelled by its government under pressure from the United States.

On the tape, Mr. bin Laden suggested that first Britain, and then the United States — "through its international tools such as the United Nations" — had supported secessionist forces in the south to hasten a Sudanese breakup.

He said the United States had exploited differences between Sudanese tribes "and turned them into a blind war between them that destroys all in preparation to send crusader troops to occupy the region and steal its oil."

The United States has declared the atrocities in Darfur a genocide. It supports the deployment of 7,000 African Union peacekeeping troops to the region; they are set to be reorganized by Sept. 30 as a United Nations force. In the meantime, United Nations envoys say the violence in Darfur has been increasing.

Perhaps 200,000 people in the Darfur region have been killed or died of hunger and disease, and up to two million black villagers have been driven from their homes by Arab militias believed to have been backed by Khartoum, though the Sudanese government denies this.

On the tape, Mr. bin Laden called on supporters in Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula to prepare for "a long-term war against the Crusaders in western Sudan." But he also denounced the Khartoum government, saying it had "abandoned the implementation of sharia law and neglected the south." Sharia law is traditional Islamic law.

Western leaders have sought in vain to persuade President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan to disarm the janjaweed militias behind much of the violence in Darfur.

The taped message also lashed out at the West for rejecting Mr. bin Laden's offer of a "long truce," issued in his last audiotape, played Jan. 19 by Al Jazeera. "Both sides can enjoy security and stability under this truce so we can build Iraq and Afghanistan," Mr. bin Laden said in that recording.

But the latest tape said: "The politicians of the West do not want dialogue other than for the sake of dialogue to gain time. And they do not want a truce unless it is from our side only."

Al Jazeera said a part of the tape that it did not air scoffed at King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for his calls for "a dialogue among civilizations."

The tape drew mixed reactions from American lawmakers.

Representative Peter Hoekstra, Republican of Michigan and chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said on Fox News that the tape underscored Al Qaeda's sophistication in a media battle aimed at "winning the hearts and the minds of moderate Islam." He added: "They are focused on that. We need to be focused on it."

But Democrats said again that it underscored a crucial Bush administration failure.

"We took our eye off the ball when President Bush decided to go after Iraq instead of Osama bin Laden," [Senator Carl Levin](#) of Michigan, the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, said on CNN.