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Bin Laden urges Europeans to quit Afghanistan: tape

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Osama bin Laden

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DUBAI (AFP) - Osama bin Laden urged Europeans to break ranks with the United States and quit Afghanistan, while stressing he alone was behind the 9/11 attacks, in a tape attributed to him on Al-Jazeera television on Thursday.

The United States "insisted on invading" Afghanistan even though it knew that the Afghans were not behind the 2001 attacks, and "Europe walked behind it," the voice purported to be that of the Al-Qaeda chief said in a "message to the European peoples."

"It would be better for you if you (restrained) your politicians who flock to the White House and worked actively to end the wrong done to the oppressed," he said in the audiotape.

"I am responsible" for the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, the speaker said.

Qatar-based Al-Jazeera aired a head shot of a smiling bin Laden wearing a white headdress of the type used by Muslim fundamentalist clerics. There was no indication of the timing of the tape.

"The truth, as I said before, is that the Manhattan events were in retaliation for the killing of our kinfolk in Palestine and Lebanon by the US-Israeli alliance and that I am responsible for them," the voice said.

"I affirm that the Afghans -- government and people -- had no knowledge whatsoever of these events and America knows that," since it captured and interrogated some ministers from the Islamist militant Taliban movement, which was ousted from power by a 2001 US invasion.

By following in the footsteps of the US in Afghanistan after 9/11, Europe could only be a "subordinate" to Washington, as attested to by the fact that "you entered this war and US soldiers were exempted from accountability in European courts."

"That is why my message is addressed to you, not to your politicians," said the typically soft-spoken voice thought to be that of the world's most wanted man.

"It is no longer a secret that (former British prime minister Tony) Blair, (British Prime Minister Gordon) Brown, (former Italian premier Silvio) Berlusconi, (former Spanish prime minister Jose Maria) Aznar and (French President Nicolas) Sarkozy and their ilk like to be under the shadow of the White House," the speaker said.

"They're not much different from many Third World leaders."

The voice claimed that US influence was waning, saying US forces will go back home and "leave neighbours to settle scores."

The speaker accused countries which took part in the Afghan war of flouting war ethics, accusing them of targeting women and children in their air strikes and other attacks.

"You know that our women don't fight, but you deliberately target them even during weddings in an attempt to break the morale of the mujahedeen," the voice said.

The United States promptly dismissed the message, saying it was "not a new tactic" and European commitment to Kabul was strong.

"Not a new tactic," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters when asked to comment whether Al-Qaeda might be trying to

split the US-led coalition in Afghanistan.

"I think our NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) allies understand quite clearly what is at stake here," he said.

In his last message on October 22, bin Laden called in an audiotape on leaders of the insurgency in Iraq to bury their rivalries and unite in a common fight against the US-led coalition.

In September, a bin Laden video was released to coincide with the sixth anniversary of the September 11 attacks on the United States in which nearly 3,000 people were killed.

In October 2003, bin Laden warned of suicide bombings against European countries with troops in the US-led coalition in Iraq.

But in an audiotape broadcast on April 15, 2004, he offered "a reconciliation initiative ... to stop operations against all (European) countries if they promise not to be aggressive towards Muslims."

Despite a massive manhunt and a 25-million-dollar bounty on his head, bin Laden has evaded capture and has regularly taunted the United States and its allies through warnings issued on video and audio cassettes.

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