

Name _____



How al-Qaeda Began

By Toni Lee Robinson

How often do you hear the word "terrorism"? When we hear the word, most of us think of September 11, 2001. That day on our TV screens, we saw death, destruction, and fear. All these are elements of terrorism.

Terrorists work outside the law. Violence is their basic tool. They injure, kill, and destroy. Their aim is to create terror, or extreme fear. Through fear, they hope to force people to go along with their ideas.

Has terrorism always played such a major part in world events? Not really. Our grandparents rarely heard the word. But terrorism began long ago.

Ancient Greeks wrote of the use of fear as a weapon of war. The Roman Emperor Caligula killed people and kept their property. He used fear to keep people from opposing him.

In France, the years 1793-94 were called the "Reign of Terror." New rulers had taken over in the French Revolution. They used terror to force people to accept their rule. Many people were put in prison. Some were beheaded. The word "terrorism" was first used during this time.

Today, al-Qaeda (all-KY-dah) is the most well-known terror group in the world. But what is al-Qaeda? Experts say it is more a network than a group. Little groups of people from all over the world are a part of al-Qaeda.

Many of these groups have their own strong beliefs. They may be made up of people who are unhappy with their country's leaders. Or they might believe so strongly in their religion that they think everyone should be made to live by it.

Al-Qaeda provides an "umbrella" under which these groups can gather. The man who led al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001, Osama bin Laden, was a wealthy man who came from Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden believed that all Muslim nations should be one country. He thought

that people should be ruled by the strict laws of Islam. He also said that Muslims should get rid of those who don't believe as they do.

Al-Qaeda's name means "the base." It was started in the 1980s by volunteers in Afghanistan, a Muslim nation that had been invaded by Soviet forces. Muslims were angry that a non-Muslim country had soldiers on Muslim soil. Bin Laden and other Arabs came to Afghanistan to help fight the Soviets.

The wealthy Arabs trained soldiers. They bought equipment and supplies. After ten years of war against the fierce Afghani fighters, the Soviets retreated. Bin Laden and his friends were excited. Their jihad (GEE-hawd), or holy war, had beaten one of the world's superpowers! What other battles could they win?

The group of Arabs began to train more soldiers. But these warriors wouldn't be fighting on a battlefield. They were trained to carry out terrorist missions. They learned to attack anywhere and everywhere. They learned the methods that killed 3,000 people in the U.S. on 9/11.

After September 11, U.S. forces bombed the al-Qaeda base in Afghanistan. Training camps were destroyed. Many of the group were killed. Osama bin Laden disappeared.

Since then, police have arrested thousands of members of al-Qaeda groups. A third of its leaders are dead, including Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden was tracked down and killed by U.S. forces in May 2011. Al-Qaeda is still alive, but it has been weakened.

Maybe one day we will eliminate terrorism. Perhaps there will come a time when no one thinks it is right to use fear as a weapon. Meanwhile, agents and policemen continue to go after the al-Qaeda network.



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Questions

- _____ 1. What weapon of war is mentioned in ancient Greek writings?
 - A. fear
 - B. kindness
 - C. starvation
 - D. deception

- _____ 2. The word "terrorism" was first used:
 - A. by the ancient Greeks
 - B. by Osama bin Laden
 - C. during the French Revolution
 - D. by the Roman Emperor Caligula

- _____ 3. Osama bin Laden was from what country?
 - A. Saudi Arabia
 - B. Afghanistan
 - C. France
 - D. the U.S.

- _____ 4. Muslims were upset about Soviets occupying Afghanistan because:
 - A. The Soviets had powerful weapons that frightened people.
 - B. The Soviets smoked cigarettes.
 - C. The Soviets ate pork.
 - D. The Soviets were non-Muslims on Muslim soil.

- 5. Explain what Osama bin Laden did in Afghanistan before al-Qaeda was formed.

- _____ 6. What does "jihad" mean?
 - A. holy war
 - B. terrorism
 - C. the base
 - D. Let's go!

- _____ 7. Al-Qaeda has been called an "umbrella" for many different groups. This means:
 - A. It is a trap. Many groups have been caught by police because of it.
 - B. Many groups can't afford shelters from the weather.
 - C. Al-Qaeda members are kind to one another and provide homes and food to poorer members.
 - D. Al-Qaeda provides a general framework for many different groups who identify with its beliefs.

8. How would you define terrorism?

A basic rule of behavior states: "Treat others the way you would like to be treated." Why do you think this is called the "Golden Rule"?
