



How falcons

Nearly Brought Down

**BIN LADEN**

A bird expert knew where bin Laden was.  
Why didn't the U.S. government go after him?



Alan Parrot

I am a lawyer for spies and whistleblowers. One of my most unusual clients obtained an electronic tracking device for Osama bin Laden's traveling entourage, but for eight years the Bush administration refused to capture bin Laden when they could. Within 1,000 days of Obama giving the order, bin Laden was dead. This is an ugly story, but it is all true. I was there.

From time to time I have been of some small service to my country as a back channel lawyer for the U.S. Intelligence Community. Under Florida law, I am allowed to completely shield my client's anonymity under the Attorney-Client privilege. There are not many lawyers who have held Top Secret COSMIC SCI security clearances who do pro bono work. Word gets around.

I have more than 600 clients. They usually pay me one dollar each. I am perhaps the worst paid lawyer in America, but among the better informed. I have been called as an expert witness by Congress, as well as the governments of Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Most of my work has been highly classified. This time, I can talk about it.

Several years ago, I was approached by Alan Parrot (pronounced Pah ROW). He is the CEO of the Union for the Conservation of Raptors, a respected international charity. Alan is an American of the Sikh faith. He was once the chief falconer for the Shah of Iran and worked for the royal families of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. He lives in his home state of Maine, wears a white turban and robes, and often carries a raptor on his forearm. Raptors are huge birds, similar to eagles or falcons, which are used for hunting in the Middle East. It is the sport of Arab kings, and it is the favorite hobby of Osama bin Laden. You might even say it is Osama's only addiction.

Bin Laden used to host falcon hunting parties as fundraisers for al-Qaeda. Hundreds of wealthy Arabs would turn up for these events, which lasted for days. They came with luxury vehicles; some specially equipped with sliding roof panels and electric seat risers so that the hunters and their birds could observe their prey in perfect comfort. Their prey was a fat pheasant known as the Hubara Bustard. It is a migratory bird that can only be found during certain months in certain mountain ranges in certain Middle Eastern countries. Needless to say, the bird is almost extinct.

In addition to cash, the wealthy Arabs used to leave their luxury cars behind for al-Qaeda to sell. The CIA used to observe these Hubara hunting parties with drone surveillance aircrafts hovering over the tri-state mountain borders of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. One model of the drones, the Predator, was also equipped with a Hellfire missile. The CIA actually has a photograph of Osama bin Laden standing in the gunsight, but they refused to pull the trigger. Osama was standing next to the Crown Prince of one of the Gulf

States, supposedly an ally of America in the global war against terror. That's the problem with buying friends. You never know if they will stay bought.

Alan Parrot can regale you for hours with stories about the perfidious Arab trade in raptors. Apparently the CIA steals endangered golden eagles in Alaska and presents them to Arab sheiks as gifts. One such bird can fetch over \$100,000 in the black market. Trading raptors is banned under international law. Apparently, neither the sheiks nor the CIA cares.

Alan had one of his agents infiltrate Osama bin Laden's hunting parties by posing as a servant. He recorded the names of the attendees, whom Alan then exposed. It is the sport of Arab kings, and it is the favorite hobby of Osama bin Laden.

Alan has been beaten and imprisoned, but he is a Sikh and Sikhs are notoriously stubborn about their religion and their honor.

There is a Sikh legend that in ancient times, the Sikhs of India conquered the raiding Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pashtun warriors surrendered rather than fight. The Sikhs imposed a harsh penalty for their cowardice: henceforward, all Afghan males had to dress as women. That is why, Alan claims, to this day Osama bin Laden wears a knee length shirt as his traditional garb. "Don't you get it?" Alan says. Osama and the Taliban wear dresses.

Well, maybe. Alan does tell fascinating stories, which is why I invited him to speak at one of my international conferences. I am President of the Intelligence Summit, an educational charity that brings together members of the Intelligence community from democratic countries, as well as the press and academia. Much to the consternation of the bureaucrats, we actually talk to each other and share unclassified information.

But Alan came to me one day with something very, very secret. One of his friends in the Middle East was running a small but lucrative smuggling network from Tajikistan across the mountain range into northeastern Iran. There, quite by accident, he stumbled across Osama bin Laden on vacation on the Iranian side of the mountains. They struck up a friendship over falcon hunting, and Osama invited Alan's source along for the party.

Osama was traveling with a small retinue of four, including a driver and chef, and three beautiful raptors. They would hunt during the day, and at night they would camp above the tree line where it was cool, sleeping on an expensive plush carpet, singing war songs by the campfire. Osama had the latest hunting equipment. Each of his enormous birds was equipped with an electronic radio collar that trailed a small antenna. Each collar had a different radio frequency. Alan's source wrote down the frequency numbers when no one was looking.

Osama could ride in his white Range Rover in air conditioned comfort and track his falcon electronically. He moved in quickly when his bird brought down a Hubara Bustard. Osama would tear off the



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Hubara's head, and feed it to his raptor as a reward. Then his chef would prepare the bird, and they would feast. It was a great party, great hunting. The government of Iran had closed these mountains to all falcon hunters—except Osama bin Laden.

After 9/11, bin Laden was arguably the most hunted man on earth. According to Alan's source, the government of Iran allowed him to spend four to six months a year in their country to receive medical treatment, visit his family, and hunt.

I knew part of this story from other sources. Osama had a problem with his kidneys, which explains his sallow, almost yellow complexion. Years ago, the Saudi intelligence service donated two kidney dialysis machines to the Taliban. One was for the major hospital in Kabul, which is still in use. The other was for Osama's personal use.

Only, Osama's kidney machine was rigged. Instead of curing him, it was slowly poisoning him. Osama figured out what was happening, and fled to Iran for medical care. The Saudis fired their intelligence chief for his failure to get rid of Osama. It was three weeks before 9/11. The Saudis knew what was coming. Their accountant in Deutsche Bank purchased two put options on September 10. In other words, the Saudis were betting that on the following day, the stock of two particular airlines would crash. The House of Saud was always about profit.

The Ayatollah of Iran told Osama that his family would be granted

sanctuary in Tehran, on the condition that whenever he visited the country, his son would be held under VIP house arrest in Tehran to guarantee that Osama would not embarrass Iran while he was on his hunting vacations. According to Alan's source, all the CIA had to do was surveil the son's house to find out when Osama had left his lair in Pakistan to go hunting in Iran. The hunting season began in September, with the first migration of the Hubara, and ended in March.

By April, Osama was always back in Pakistan—but where exactly, Alan's source did not know. But, Alan smiled, they could always track Osama wherever he was in Iran for the five months of hunting season. The radio collars on Osama's raptors broadcast for ten miles when the birds were in the air, but only a mile when they were on the ground. Alan, an experienced hunter, could tell from the antenna position whether the bird was in the air, on the ground, or perched on Osama's arm.

Osama had equipped himself with a tracking device that used unique frequencies. All they had to do was lure his falcon with tasty pigeon bait close to the Tajik border with Iran, and then kidnap Osama when he came to retrieve his falcon. Alan wanted me to negotiate payment of the \$25 million dollar reward and arrange U.S. government transportation for Osama back to America. Easy job, no problem, Alan said.

I knew it would be anything but easy. I emailed a quick memo to a trusted friend who had just retired from the CIA. She hand-car-



Surrounded by red fabric, the compound in Abbotabad in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was killed in a firefight with U.S. forces on Sunday, May 1, ending a nearly 10-year worldwide hunt for the mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks.

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ried my Osama memo to her friend, who was a senior CIA officer in Washington. Her friend forwarded my memo directly to CIA headquarters. It was a short, but I thought welcome, message. We had Osama gift wrapped, ready for pickup.

Nothing happened. No one called.

As it happens, I live across Tampa Bay from MacDill Air Base, where both Central Command and Special Operations Command are headquartered. I also knew there was a small liaison headquarters for the CIA. I introduced myself, explained what had happened, and asked what was going on. One of the CIA operatives drove to my home and debriefed me. I said that as soon as the CIA deposited the reward money into an escrow account, my client would turn over the precise radio frequencies and they could pick Osama up. He seemed very excited.

Nothing happened. No one called.

I had the sinking feeling that someone in Langley might have accidentally on purpose "lost" my two memos. I tried another route. I have low friends in high places (or is it high friends in low places?). I had two very detailed memos sent by overnight express to the Director of the CIA and to the head of the Clandestine Services. A friend of a friend placed my memo directly in the DCI's inbox on top of the stack. This time, I knew it would not get lost. He would read it.

Nothing happened. No one called.

I can be a little slow sometimes. I asked another friend, the CIA's "snatch and grab" expert, why no one would even call me back about capturing bin Laden alive. We had an electronic tracker on him; it doesn't get any better than that.

My friend laughed and said, "Don't you get it, John? The last thing they want is for anyone to capture bin Laden alive. Think of what he could say on the stand in a public trial." I didn't believe him at first.

Alan was getting frantic. The Boston office of the FBI had telephoned him to warn him that he would be arrested if he continued with his schemes to kidnap Osama bin Laden on foreign soil. Kidnapping was a crime, and Alan would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

It got worse.

Another friend confirmed that the NSA had picked up Osama bin Laden's voiceprint inside Iran. Alan had been right. My friend asked the Joint Special Operations Command if they would like to have an electronic tracking frequency for Osama. After conferring with higher headquarters, they turned him down flat.

Once again, nothing happened. No one called.

I asked my friend, the snatch and grab guy, to tell me what was going on. He chided me and explained it as if I were a simpleton. With all the high tech resources of the U.S. government, of course we knew that Osama was in Iran every year, but we pretended not to know because then we would have to do something about it. If we went public with proof that Iran was harboring the worst terrorist in the world (and most of his family), we would have to declare war on Iran.

And Condoleezza Rice had made a firm rule: one war at a time. Shortly after we broke all land speed records in conquering Iraq, the Army wanted to swing left and crush Syria for letting the terrorists come in the back door and attack American troops. "It would have taken the U.S. Army 20 minutes to conquer the Syrian Army; 19 to stop laughing, and one to win the war," said the U.S. Secretary of State.

We had the troops, the arms, and the ammunition right on Syria's doorstep, but Condi said no go.

It did not matter how much evidence I had of Osama in Iran, this administration would always ignore it. One war at a time. Iran and

Osama would have to wait.

Alan did not feel like waiting, especially with the \$25 million dollar reward money dangling in front of him. He had hired a film crew from Finland as cover. He had gotten permission from the unwitting Iranian ministry of natural resources to make a nature documentary in the mountains at the same time as Osama's hunting season. He would even have a couple of men from the Iranian Republican Guard Corps for body guards and expeditors. When Alan picked up bin Laden's signal, he planned to kill the bodyguards, kidnap bin Laden, and drag him over the mountains into Tajikistan. We would collect the reward for bin Laden without government help.

I ran Alan's scheme past my snatch and grab expert. He told me flat out that the U.S. government would warn the Iranians we were coming. They would rather toss Alan, an American citizen, into a Tehran dungeon for life, than risk the chance that he might succeed in bringing home bin Laden. A total of eight people from different agencies delivered the same warning. If my client went ahead, he would be dead.

None of my friends in U.S. intelligence would help me. I was stunned, and stubborn. I was not a big fan of President Bush, but he was still my President and he had a right to know what was going on. I had another friend deliver my memo to the two White House staffers who control the contents of the President's inbox.

They were stunned. No one in the intelligence community had ever told the President that we knew where bin Laden was, but were ignoring him. But it was too late to do anything, they said. The Bush administration was almost over. "Everyone is too busy sending out their resumes," they said. It was just another problem that they would leave on the shelf for Obama.

A neocon friend of mine, Ken Timmerman, wrote a book on how the CIA and other U.S. agencies sabotaged the Bush administration. Ken calls me "the pugnacious John Loftus, who attacks both Republicans and Democrats equally." I told Alan Parrot there is a time to fight and a time to withdraw. If he went ahead with the kidnap attempt, the U.S. government would betray him to the Iranians. I could not help him anymore.

Alan asked if I would say that on camera. I said I would. He and his Finnish friends made a movie called "Feathered Cocaine" about Osama bin Laden's addiction to falcon hunting, and it is now being presented at film festivals around the world. No one believes this has happened. They dismiss the stories told by Alan's Tajik source of his several vacations with Osama as the unverified ranting of a smuggler.

Even after one of Osama bin Laden's family escaped to the Saudis from Iran and begged for sanctuary, no one in the U.N. moved against Iran for hiding bin Laden's family. No one asks too many questions. The bin Laden family has answers that many American politicians do

not want to hear. They already know how Arab extremists like Sami al Arian delivered a narrow edge to give Florida to Bush over Gore. Few of the Islamists were even citizens, but they voted anyway. None of them were ever prosecuted.

Some in Washington also know about Bush's father, and how he was partners with the bin Ladens in the Carlyle group. They know about how the Saudis laundered money to terrorists under the cover of American charities. To this day, the IIIT, the Saudi front group, has never been placed on the list of groups that give financial support to terrorists.

The IIIT is an off limits terrorist group. It was a system set up by Vice President Bush under the Reagan administration to move money to the Mujahedeen of Afghanistan, without Congress or the CIA knowing that U.S. tax payers' dollars were being funneled by the Saudis to terrorist groups selected by the Pakistani military intelligence service. No wonder Osama felt safe enough to build his mansion across the street from the Pakistani version of West Point. They were more than his friends. They were his paymasters.

No wonder President Obama never told the Pakistanis that the Navy Seals would attack Osama's house at one o'clock in the morning. Obama can keep secrets too.

His first move as President was to reverse the Reagan-Bush hands off policy, and make the capture of Osama bin Laden priority number one for the Intelligence Community. Apparently, someone warned Obama what would happen if they ever brought Osama back alive. His trial testimony would tear the country apart: two former Presidents might have to be brought before the Grand Jury.

Obama changed the orders. Do not take bin Laden alive. Kill him on sight. And they did. It took less than a thousand days to carry out Obama's order. The Bush administration had closed their eyes to Osama for eight years. So what happens now that Osama is dead? Nothing happens. Osama was a figurehead, a fundraiser. Operational control of al-Qaeda always rested with Dr. Al Zawahiri and the rest of the Egyptian terrorists who splintered off from the Muslim Brotherhood. They are the brains and spine of al-Qaeda. They will continue their war against Jews, Christians, democracies, and western culture, just as their fathers did for the Third Reich. It is a warm irony that Osama died on the same day as Hitler. There is some balance in that, some small echo of the triumph of justice over evil.

But why did we have to wait for so long? ●

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