

The King Of Terror:

Exclusive Zman Interview

Bin Laden's Biographer Speaks To Zman

- Shimon Rosenberg

He looked the world's greatest terrorist in the eye and lived to tell the story. He spoke three times with one of the Jewish people's most virulent adversaries in recent memory, the sworn enemy of all Americans.

What is his motive? Is Hamid Mir himself an al-Qaeda faithful who seeks to propagate the image of Osama bin Laden as a martyr for the sake of Islam, as Western analysts believe? Or is he a journalist who is driven to provide the world an objective account of the life

and views of the deceased terror mastermind, as he claims?

One thing we do know: Mir is the only journalist to have met with bin Laden on three separate occasions. He is also the only journalist to have met with bin Laden after September 11, 2001. In an exclusive interview with Zman, Mir shares with our readers astounding details about his dramatic meeting with bin Laden and reveals previously unknown facts about al-Qaeda and its leader.

He was sure he was experiencing his final moments on this world. Hungry and weary, with terrible stomach cramps, he was certain the al-Qaeda terrorists would soon finish him off and bury him there among the desolate mountains of Afghanistan. He thought of his wife and children back home and had to wonder why he had recklessly decided to embark on this dangerous journey. Was it worth the chance of succeeding and earning a bit of attention? For a chance at fleeting fame, was he prepared to die young?

For the last two days, Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir had trekked over the mountain passes along the Afghan-Pakistan border. The terrorists among whom he walked, who were in close contact with their “supreme leader,” had promised to lead him to their hideout. There he would have the opportunity to speak with the world’s most notorious terrorist.

Mir had jumped at the offer. For a journalist, this was the scoop of a lifetime. International news agencies would chase him for special interviews and he would be the talk of the world. He would earn millions by writing a book about his experience. And the CIA and other Western intelligence agencies would pay him anything he asked for whatever crumbs of information he could share with them....

But now, after several days of wandering along the treacherous mountain passes, Mir was filled with self-doubt. His guides had blindfolded him and shared with him only the barest minimum of food. They had smeared him with a strange cream that caused him to retch and forced him to ingest strange tablets that gave him severe stomach aches.

And there were the constant explosions all around.

What had made him choose to follow the journalistic profession? He could have become a simple shoemaker and enjoyed a life of adequate sustenance rather than undergo this horrendous torture.

Mir realized that they were drawing nearer to the hideout. He understood that the

explosions were American bombs seeking out the terror leader who was responsible for the untimely demise of so many innocent Americans. He trembled from fright as he faced the fact that he was walking right into a war zone. Any second a bomb might land near them—he wouldn’t even have a chance to see the plane approaching overhead....

His escorts did not offer him much time to contemplate the situation, though. They led him into a cramped cave where the air was sticky and reeked of staleness. Then the blindfold was removed and Mir found himself face-to-face with a tall Arab with a grey beard. The man introduced himself as Osama bin Laden.

The unknown Pakistani journalist was standing before the world’s most infamous terrorist. The man the entire Western world was desperate to catch and eliminate; the man who carried a reward of millions of dollars on his head.

Rise of an Intrepid Journalist

Mir is the only journalist in the world to have met with the terrorist leader on three different occasions. The third and last time was two months after the September 11 attacks. Bin Laden had just barely managed to evade his pursuers in the Tora Bora Mountains of eastern Afghanistan (See *Zman* Iyar 5771/May 2011). It was to be the only interview the supreme leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist organization would grant after 9/11.

Mir is an internationally famous writer who has authored hundreds of articles in Arabic and English. In the course of his career, he has managed to interview many colorful figures from all across the ideological spectrum. He has met with an American secretary of state and with al-Qaeda’s supreme leader, with Saddam Hussein and with Shimon Peres.

Speaking to *Zman*, Mir explained that he won the trust of many terrorists worldwide because he has always been careful to convey their words accurately, without twisting their statements for his own purposes.



Hamid Mir, the Pakistani journalist. Inset: Waris Mir, Hamid’s respected journalist father, who was killed for criticizing Zia-ul-Haq.

“They like this,” Mir tells us. “They want us to write it word for word.”

But others say bin Laden chose to speak with Mir not because of his reputation for accuracy, but because he himself embraced the terrorist’s cause. (See sidebar for our discussion with Mir about his own leanings.)

Originally, Mir had no plans of becoming a journalist. He only did so to perpetuate the memory of his father. Mir was born on July 23, 1966, in a small village near Islamabad. His family belongs to the country’s elite. They are well-educated and influential in political circles. Mir’s grandfather, Mir Abdul Aziz, was a renowned poet and a leader in the party of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who spearheaded Pakistan’s independence movement and became its founding father.

Hamid’s father, Waris Mir, was a renowned writer in Pakistan, author of a popular column in the *Daily Jang* and a professor of journalism. When he was in his eighties, Waris Mir got into a disagreement with Pakistan’s dictator, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, who rose to power in 1977 as a result of a coup against democratically elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Bhutto was a hero in Pakistan, having reorganized the country politically and economically into a developed nation. However, when the election of 1977 led to a stalemate, General Zia-ul-Haq grabbed the reins of power. He had Bhutto hanged in public and declared himself military

dictator. The new leader brutally suppressed any opposition against his regime.

Waris Mir was one of those who openly opposed the new government, publishing articles criticizing the use of force and terror. People believed that Mir would be immune to the excesses of the new military regime due to his respected background and present status, but this was an illusion. Despite his connections in high places, Waris Mir was fired from all of his prestigious positions. When that failed to prevent Waris Mir from campaigning against the new regime, the general decided to eliminate him.

In July, 1987, Waris Mir met with an unknown co-conspirator in a restaurant to discuss ways of overthrowing the dictatorial regime. When Waris arrived home he felt



Pakistani dictator General Zia-ul-Haq meets with President Reagan in the White House.



Former Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on the way to his trial. In a move condemned by the entire world, General Zia-ul-Haq had him publicly hanged. Inset: General Zia-ul-Haq.