

Prepared Statement of John Walker Lindh to the Court

October 4, 2002

United States District Court, Eastern District of Virginia

Alexandria, VA

To begin, I would like to thank God who has protected and sustained me. I would also like to thank the Court for giving me this opportunity to accept full responsibility for violating the U.S. sanctions on Afghanistan last year, to express my remorse for what's happened, and to express my gratitude to my family and those who have supported me. I would also like to explain how and why I went to Afghanistan as a soldier with the Taliban in its conflict with the Northern Alliance.

First, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their unfaltering love and support. I know they have experienced a tremendous amount of pain throughout this past year and for that I am sorry.

I would also like to say that I am very grateful to my attorneys whose support of me never wavered, to those who treated my wounds on the USS PELELIU, and to those who helped bring me home. I also want to express my appreciation to the many Americans who have supported me and my family through letters, emails and editorials. I understand why so many Americans were angry when I was first discovered in Afghanistan. I realize that many still are but I hope that with time and understanding, those feelings will change.

I would like to take some time to explain how I ended up in Afghanistan.

Prior to [May](#) of last year, I was a student of Islam at a school in Pakistan, having previously studied the Arabic language in Yemen. In [June](#), after receiving three weeks of military training in Northern Pakistan, I traveled to Afghanistan in order to assist the Taliban government in opposing the warlords of the Northern Alliance. After being required to take additional military training at a facility in Afghanistan, I volunteered as a foot soldier on the front lines in the province of Takhar, in northeastern Afghanistan. I arrived there on [September 6, 2001](#).

I went to Afghanistan because I believed it was my religious duty to assist my fellow Muslims militarily in their jihad against the Northern Alliance. Because the term "jihad" has been commonly misunderstood, I'd like to take a few minutes to explain the meaning of the term. In the Arabic language, jihad literally means 'struggle.' In Islamic terminology, jihad refers to the spending of one's utmost exertion in the service of God.

I have never understood jihad to mean anti-Americanism or terrorism. I condemn terrorism on every level--unequivocally. My beliefs about jihad are those of mainstream Muslims around the world. I believe that jihad ranges from striving to overcome own personal faults, to speaking out for the truth in adverse circumstances, to military action in the defense of justice. The type of jihad one practices depends upon one's circumstances, but the essence of any form of jihad lies in the intent.

Last year, I felt that I had an obligation to assist what I perceived to be an Islamic liberation movement against the warlords who were occupying several provinces in Northern Afghanistan. I had learned from books, articles and individuals with first-hand experience of numerous atrocities committed by the Northern Alliance against civilians. I had heard reports of massacres, child rape, torture and castration. I also knew that many of these warlords had fought alongside the Soviet Union in the [1980's](#) during the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. I went to Afghanistan because I believed there was no way to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people aside from military action. I did not go to fight against America, and I never did.

I saw the war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance as a continuation of the war between the mujahideen and the Soviets. I knew that the mujahideen had been supported by the United States. In addition, I knew that the Northern Alliance continued to be funded and armed by the Russian government throughout the [1990's](#) and up until last year.

My experience of living in Afghanistan was limited to military life as a trainee and as a soldier. In retrospect, I had no real exposure to the life of

civilians under the rule of the Taliban. Since returning to the United States, I have learned more about the Taliban, such as reports of the Taliban's repression of women, which I did not see or hear of while I was in Afghanistan, and which I believe is strongly condemned by Islam.

I have also become aware of the relationship between the leaders of the Taliban and Usama bin Laden's organization. Bin Laden's terrorist attacks are completely against Islam, completely contrary to the conventions of jihad and without any justification whatsoever. His grievances, whatever they may be, cannot be addressed by acts of injustice and violence against innocent people in America. Terrorism is never justified and has proved extremely damaging to Muslims around the world. I have never supported terrorism in any form and never would.

I went to Afghanistan with the intention of fighting against terrorism and oppression, not to support it.

Although I thought I knew a good deal about the Taliban when I went to the front line, it's clear to me now that there were many things of which I was not aware. I made a mistake by joining the Taliban. I want the Court to know, and I want the American people to know that had I realized then what I know now about the Taliban, I would never have joined them.

When I began my studies in Islam, I had the ambition of one day teaching, writing, and translating Arabic texts into English. I still have these ambitions and hope to pursue my studies in Islam, the Arabic language, World History, Linguistics, Sociology and English Literature. I hope to use this knowledge to serve Islam and the interests of Muslims in America and around the world to the full extent of my capability.

To conclude, I would like to again thank the Court for giving me this opportunity to speak.

Source: Defendant's Attorneys.

Note: Prepared statement does not necessarily constitute a transcript of actual statements in court; actual statements may differ.

Legal Pleadings And Court Opinions: U.S. v. John Walker Lindh