



Testimony

Home • News • Testimony • Al-Qaeda International

Info This is archived material from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) website. It may contain outdated information and links may no longer function.

Twitter Facebook Share



J. T. Caruso
Acting Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, FBI
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate
Washington, DC

December 08, 2001

Good morning, Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is J.T. Caruso and I am the Acting Assistant Director of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division. I am pleased to appear before the Subcommittee to discuss Al Qaeda International.

AL-QAEDA INTERNATIONAL

"Al-Qaeda" ("The Base") was developed by Usama Bin Laden and others in the early 1980's to support the war effort in Afghanistan against the Soviets. The resulting "victory" in Afghanistan gave rise to the overall "Jihad" (Holy War) movement. Trained Mujahedin fighters from Afghanistan began returning to such countries as Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia, with extensive "jihad" experience and the desire to continue the "jihad". This antagonism began to be refocused against the U.S. and its allies.

Sometime in 1989, Al-Qaeda dedicated itself to further opposing non-Islamic governments in this region with force and violence. The group grew out of the "mekhtab al khidemat" (the Services Office) organization which maintained offices in various parts of the world, including Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States. Al-Qaeda began to provide training camps and guesthouses in various areas for the use of Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups. They attempted to recruit U.S. citizens to travel throughout the Western world to deliver messages and engage in financial transactions for the benefit of Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups and to help carry out operations. By 1990 Al-Qaeda was providing military and intelligence training in various areas including Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Sudan, for the use of Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups, including the Al-Jihad (Islamic Jihad) organization.

One of the principal goals of Al-Qaeda was to drive the United States armed forces out of Saudi Arabia (and elsewhere on the Saudi Arabian peninsula) and Somalia by violence. Members of Al-Qaeda issued fatwahs (rulings on Islamic law) indicating that such attacks were both proper and necessary.

Al-Qaeda opposed the United States for several reasons. First, the United States was regarded as an "infidel" because it was not governed in a manner consistent with the group's extremist interpretation of Islam. Second, the United States was viewed as providing essential support for other "infidel" governments and institutions, particularly the governments of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the nation of Israel and the United Nations organization, which were regarded as enemies of the group. Third, Al-Qaeda opposed the involvement of the United States armed forces in the Gulf War in 1991 and in Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1992 and 1993, which were viewed by Al-Qaeda as pretextual preparations for an American occupation of Islamic countries. In particular, Al-Qaeda opposed the continued presence of American military forces in Saudi Arabia (and elsewhere on the Saudi Arabian peninsula) following the Gulf War. Fourth, Al-Qaeda opposed the United States Government because of the arrest, conviction and imprisonment of persons belonging to Al-Qaeda or its affiliated terrorist groups or with whom it worked, including Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, who was convicted in the first World Trade Center bombing.

From its inception until approximately 1991, the group was headquartered in Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan. Then in 1991, the group relocated to the Sudan where it was headquartered until approximately 1996, when Bin Laden, Mohammed Atef and other members of Al-Qaeda returned to Afghanistan. During the years Al-Qaeda was headquartered in Sudan the network continued to maintain offices in various parts of the world and established businesses which were operated to provide income and cover to Al-Qaeda operatives.

AL-QAEDA TIES TO OTHER TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

Although Al-Qaeda functions independently of other terrorist organizations, it also functions through some of the terrorist organizations that operate under its umbrella or with its support, including: the Al-Jihad, the Al-Gamma Al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group) - led by Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman and later by Ahmed Refai Taha, a/k/a "Abu Yasser al Masri,"), Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and a number of jihad groups in other countries, including the Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia, Croatia, Albania, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, the Kashmiri region of India, and the Chechen region of Russia. Al-Qaeda also maintained cells and personnel in a number of countries to facilitate its activities, including in Kenya, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. By banding together, Al-Qaeda proposed to work together against the perceived common enemies in the West - particularly the United States which Al-Qaeda regards as an "infidel" state which provides essential support for other "infidel" governments. Al-Qaeda responded to the presence of United States armed forces in the Gulf and the arrest, conviction and imprisonment in the United States of persons belonging to Al-Qaeda by issuing fatwahs indicating that attacks against U.S. interests, domestic and foreign, civilian and military, were both proper and necessary. Those fatwahs resulted in attacks against U.S. nationals in locations around the world including Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Yemen, and now in the United States. Since 1993, thousands of people have died in those attacks.

THE FATWAH'S OF AL-QAEDA

The Fatwah Against American Troops in Somalia

At various times from about 1992 until about 1993, Usama Bin Laden, working together with members of the fatwah committee of Al-Qaeda, disseminated fatwahs to other members and associates of Al-Qaeda which directed that the United States forces stationed in the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, should be attacked. Indeed, Bin Laden has claimed responsibility for the deaths of 18 U.S. servicemen killed in "Operation Restore Hope" in Somalia in 1994. February, 1998 Fatwah

On February 22, 1998, Bin Laden issued a fatwah stating that it is the duty of all Muslims to kill Americans. This fatwah read, in part, that "in compliance with God's order, we issue the following fatwah to all Muslims: the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies, including civilians and military, is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it." This fatwah appears to have provided the religious justification for, and marked the start of logistical planning for, the U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

In February 1998, Usama Bin Ladin and one of his top lieutenants and leader of the Al-Jihad organization in Egypt, Ayman Al Zawahiri, endorsed a fatwah under the banner of the "International Islamic Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders." This fatwah, published in the publication Al-Quds al-Arabi on February 23, 1998, stated that Muslims should kill Americans -- including civilians -- anywhere in the world where they can be found. In or about April 1998, one of the defendants in the East Africa trial, Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, discussed the fatwahs issued by Bin Ladin and Al-Qaeda against America with another defendant, Mustafa Mohamed Fadhil. This discussion took place in Kenya.

THE TRIAL IN NEW YORK CITY

As was revealed at the trial that took place in New York earlier this year, a former member of Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network began working with the United States government in 1996. That witness revealed that Bin Laden had a terrorist group, Al-Qaeda, which had privately declared war on America and was operating both on its own and as an umbrella for other terrorist groups. The witness revealed that Al-Qaeda had a close working relationship with the aforementioned Egyptian terrorist group known as Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The witness recounted that Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were seeking to obtain nuclear and chemical weapons and that the organization engaged in sophisticated training. He also revealed that Al-Qaeda obtained specialized terrorist training from and worked with Iranian government officials and the terrorist group Hezbollah. Thereafter, in August 1996, two years prior to the bombings of the embassies in East Africa, Usama Bin Laden issued a public Declaration of Jihad against the United States military. This was followed by a series of other statements including a February 1998 joint declaration, signed by Usama Bin Laden and the leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), among others, which declared war on the American population, military and civilian. The public statements corroborated the witness information that Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and EIJ were working to kill Americans. In May 1998, Bin Laden gave a press interview in which he threatened American interests and complained that the United States was using its embassies overseas to track down terrorists.

On August 7, 1998, the bombings of the embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, occurred roughly simultaneously. The persons who carried out the attacks in Kenya and Tanzania have since been identified publicly: the principal participants were members of Al-

Qaeda and/or the affiliated terrorist group EIJ. Indeed, Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-Owhali, a Saudi who admitted he was in the bomb truck used in Nairobi, confessed that he had been trained in Al-Qaeda camps, fought with the Taliban in Afghanistan (with the permission of Usama Bin Laden), had asked Bin Laden for a mission and was thereafter dispatched by others to East Africa after undergoing extensive specialized training at camps in Afghanistan. Another defendant, Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, in whose residence was found a sketch of the area where the bomb was to be placed, admitted he was a member of Al-Qaeda and identified the other principal participants in the bombing as Al-Qaeda members. Odeh admitted that he was told the night prior to the bombings that Bin Laden and the others he was working with in Afghanistan had relocated from their camps because they expected the American military to retaliate.

There was independent proof of the involvement of Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and EIJ in the bombings. First, the would-be suicide bomber, al-Owhali, ran away from the bomb truck at the last minute and survived. However, he had no money or passport or plan by which to escape Kenya. Days later, he called a telephone number in Yemen and thus arranged to have money transferred to him in Kenya. That same telephone number in Yemen was contacted by Usama Bin Laden's satellite phone on the same days that al-Owhali was arranging to get money. Moreover, al-Owhali and Odeh both implicated men named "Harun," "Saleh" and "Abdel Rahman," now all fugitives, as organizing the Nairobi bombing. All three have been conclusively shown to be Al-Qaeda and/or EIJ members. Indeed, documents recovered in a 1997 search of a house in Kenya showed Harun to be an Al-Qaeda member in Kenya. The house where the Nairobi bomb was assembled was located and proved to have been rented by that same Al-Qaeda member Harun. Moreover, the records for the telephone located at the bomb factory showed calls to the same number in Yemen which al-Owhali contacted for money after the bombing and which Usama Bin Laden's satellite telephone also contacted before and after the bombings.

The person arrested for the Tanzania bombing, Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, also implicated "Saleh" and "Abdel Rahman" in the Tanzania bombing as did Odeh. Telephone records confirmed that the Kenya and Tanzania cells were in contact shortly before the bombings.

Additional proof of the involvement of Al-Qaeda and EIJ in the East Africa bombings came from a search conducted in London of several residences and business addresses belonging to Al-Qaeda and EIJ members. In those searches, a number of documents were found, including claims of responsibility in the name of a fictitious group. Al-Owhali, the would-be suicide bomber, admitted that he was told to make a videotape of himself using the name of a fictitious group, the same name found on the claims of responsibility. The claims of responsibility were received in London on the morning the bombings occurred, likely before the bombings even occurred. The claim documents could be traced back to a telephone number that was in contact with Bin Laden's satellite telephone. The claims, which were then disseminated to the press, were clearly authored by someone genuinely familiar with the bombing conspirators as they stated that the bombings were carried out by two Saudis in Kenya and one Egyptian in Tanzania. The nationality of the bombers did not become known to investigators until weeks later. Moreover, the plan had been for two Saudis to be killed in the Nairobi bombing but only one was actually killed as al-Owhali ran away at the last minute. Thus the claims were written by someone who knew what the plan was but before they knew the actual results.

In short, the trial record left little doubt that the East Africa embassy bombings were carried out as a joint operation of Al-Qaeda and EIJ. The testimony in the trial confirmed that:

- Al-Qaeda has access to the money, training, and equipment it needs to carry out successful terrorist attacks.
- They plan their operations well in advance and have the patience to wait to conduct the attack at the right time,
- Prior to carrying out the operation, Al-Qaeda conducts surveillance of the target, sometimes on multiple occasions, often using nationals of the target they are surveilling to enter the location without suspicion. The results of the surveillance are forwarded to Al-Qaeda HQ as elaborate "ops plans" or "targeting packages" prepared using photographs, CAD/CAM (computer assisted design/computer assisted mapping) software, and the operative's notes.

HOW U.S. MILITARY ACTIONS MIGHT AFFECT AL-QAEDA

It is too early to tell, from a law enforcement perspective, how the current military campaign in Afghanistan will affect Al-Qaeda and its ability to operate in the future. Determination and vigilance will remain the keys to any success. It is one thing to disrupt an organization such as Al-Qaeda, it is another to totally dismantle and destroy it. This must truly remain an international effort, with international cooperation on all levels, in order to be successful. All agencies within the U.S. government must remain vigilant, and must continue to cooperate and work together, in order to truly eradicate this scourge to all mankind everywhere known as Al-Qaeda.

Twitter Facebook Share

Recent Testimonies

- 04.19.16 Deciphering the Debate Over Encryption**
Amy Hess, Executive Assistant Director, Science and Technology Branch, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, Washington, D.C.
- 03.01.16 The Need for a Consolidated FBI Headquarters Building**
Richard L. Haley, II, Assistant Director, Facilities and Finance Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Washington, D.C.
- 03.01.16 Encryption Tightrope: Balancing Americans' Security and Privacy**
James B. Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the House Judiciary Committee, Washington, D.C.
- 02.25.16 FBI Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2017**
James B. Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, Washington, D.C.
- 12.09.15 Law Enforcement Implications of Illegal Online Gambling**
Joseph S. Campbell, Assistant Director, Criminal Investigative Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Washington, D.C.
- 12.09.15 Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation**
James B. Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Washington, D.C.
- 10.22.15 Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation**
James B. Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the House Judiciary Committee, Washington, D.C.
- 10.21.15 Worldwide Threats and Homeland Security Challenges**
James B. Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the House Committee on Homeland Security, Washington, D.C.
- 10.08.15 Threats to the Homeland**
James B. Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Washington, D.C.
- 08.05.15 Inspector General Access**
Kevin L. Perkins, Associate Deputy Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Joint Statement with Department of Justice Associate Deputy Attorney General Carlos Uriarte Before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Washington, D.C.

More