

Ali Mohamed: A Biographical Sketch



Ali Mohamed in a U.S. Army training video produced at Fort Bragg, circa 1989

Early Life in Egypt

Ali Mohamed (علي محمد)¹, the only al-Qa'ida operative known to have successfully infiltrated U.S. military and law enforcement agencies, was born in Kafr El Sheikh, Lower Egypt, in 1952. His father was a career soldier in the Egyptian Army, and he was raised in a devout Muslim home.² Mohamed went to local public schools and occasionally helped his uncle herd goats in the northern Sinai during his teen years. Following in his father's footsteps, Mohamed attended the Cairo Military Academy after his graduation from high school in 1970.³ He was a good student and went on to attend university near his hometown, obtaining two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree in psychology from the University of Alexandria.⁴ In addition to his native Arabic, in the course of his post-secondary education he learned English, Hebrew and French. He joined the Egyptian Army in about 1971, eventually rising to the rank of major.⁵

Radicalization

According to statements made to the FBI after his arrest, Mohamed identified his turn to militancy as having occurred in 1966, when he was fourteen.⁶ He was helping his uncle

¹ Also spelled Ali Mohammed, Ali Muhammad, etc. His known aliases include: Abu Mohamed al-Amriki, Abu Omar, Abu Osama, Ahmad Baha Adam, Ali Abdelsaoud Mustafa, Ali Taymour, Ali Abdelsaoud Mustafa Mohamed, Ali Abualacoud Mohamed, Ali Nasser, Bakhboula, Bili Bili, Haydara, Jeff, Omar and Taymour (Berger, *Ali Mohamed*, 35; *U.S.A. v. Ali Mohamed*, plea hearing, p. 26).

² Miller, *et al.*, *The Cell*, p. 140.

³ Weiser and Risen, "The Masking of a Militant."

⁴ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 10. According to his U.S. Army service records, Ali Mohamed graduated from the Cairo Military Academy in 1973 and earned a BA in psychology from the University of Alexandria in 1980 (Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, p. 103).

⁵ Williams and McCormick, "Bin Laden's man in Silicon Valley."

⁶ Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 9f. (information from FBI Special Agent Jack Cloonan [ret.], who debriefed Mohamed numerous times both before and after the attacks of 9/11).

herd goats in the Sinai when some of the livestock wandered over the border into Israel, leading ultimately to a confrontation with Israeli border guards who, according to Mohamed, killed some of the goats and maimed his uncle's feet with boiling water. It was from that experience that Mohamed formed a desire to take revenge upon what he perceived to be the enemies of Islam.

Early 1970s-1984: Service in the Egyptian Army and Islamic Jihad

Mohamed joined the Egyptian Army in 1971 and rose quickly to the rank of major. He worked as an intelligence officer in the Egyptian Special Forces, with duties including the recruitment and training of intelligence assets. He was also frequently assigned to protect Egyptian diplomats abroad,⁷ and he volunteered for a number of clandestine special operations, including a raid on a Libyan prison.⁸ In 1981, while Islamist members of his Egyptian Army unit carried out the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in Cairo, Mohamed took part in a foreign officer training exercise at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; at the end of the four-month course he was given a diploma bearing a green beret.⁹ At some point during this exercise Mohamed was approached by representatives of the CIA, who sought to recruit him as a foreign asset; the results of that meeting are unknown.¹⁰ During the same year he joined the underground Islamist terrorist organization that had assassinated Sadat, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), led by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Throughout this period—and, indeed, up until his arrest—Mohamed made no attempt to mask the ardor of his religious beliefs, openly performing the five daily prayers and freely expressing his Islamist political convictions.¹¹ According to a former Egyptian intelligence official, the Egyptian Army deemed Mohamed too religious and potentially radical and eventually discharged him in March of 1984.¹² For the next eighteen months, on the orders of Zawahiri, Mohamed worked for the Egyptian national airline, EgyptAir, as a counterterrorism security advisor, a position that enabled him to acquire sensitive information about air piracy countermeasures for the EIJ.¹³

Mohamed's next assignment from Zawahiri was to infiltrate a security agency of the U.S. government.¹⁴ In early 1984, following the kidnapping of its Beirut station chief, the CIA began to significantly increase its efforts to recruit Middle Eastern

⁷ Waldman, *et al.*, "The Infiltrator."

⁸ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 10 (information from retired FBI Special Agent Jack Cloonan).

⁹ Sullivan and Neff, "An al Qaeda operative at Fort Bragg."

¹⁰ FBI Special Agent Daniel Coleman (ret.), interview with the author, 27 August 2007. Coleman, well known to have been one of the most well-informed people about al-Qa'ida in the U.S. government in the late 1990s, also interrogated Mohamed on numerous occasions; between September of 1998 and October of 2000, during which time Mohamed was in U.S. custody, Coleman interviewed Mohamed on a near-weekly basis.

¹¹ According to Special Agent Dan Coleman (ret.), however, Mohamed showed little or no signs of religiosity while in U.S. custody; an "incessant reader," Mohamed did spend time reading the Qur'an and the Bible during this period, though Agent Coleman never knew him to pray or seek any special arrangements to accommodate Muslim practice (i.e., orientations for the five daily prayers, dietary restrictions, etc.). Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 2007.

¹² Waldman, *et al.*, "The Infiltrator"; Weiser and Risen, "The Masking of a Militant."

¹³ Weiser, "U.S. Ex-Sergeant"; Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 12 (information from retired Special Agent Jack Cloonan).

assets.¹⁵ Thus, when Mohamed – who had already been contacted by the CIA while at Fort Bragg in 1981 – approached the Cairo office of the CIA offering his services, the Cairo station chief sent out an Agency-wide cable to see if there were any operations into which Mohamed could be inserted. The Bonn station responded, and Mohamed was sent to Hamburg, Germany, to assist with an operation that attempted to infiltrate a Hezbollah-linked mosque there run by a certain Imam Mohtashemi. He was not subjected to a polygraph.¹⁶ Reporters at various news agencies were later told by anonymous sources in the CIA that Mohamed had immediately announced himself as a CIA plant to people at the Hamburg mosque but, due to the presence of an additional CIA asset there, the Agency quickly learned of his betrayal and dropped him.¹⁷ These sources also indicate that Mohamed was subsequently placed on a State Department watch list intended to bar him from entering the United States. When it learned that Mohamed was seeking a visa in 1985, the CIA says that it warned other federal agencies at that time as well not to allow him entry.¹⁸ Mohamed *was* allowed entry, however, and moved to the U.S. in September of 1985.¹⁹ According to a 1995 Boston Globe report, his entry into the country was made possible by “clandestine CIA sponsorship.”²⁰ Given that the CIA would approach Mohamed on at least one further occasion, it is clear that their experience with Mohamed in Hamburg did not decisively end the Agency’s relationship with him.

1985-1989: Service in the United States Army

In early September of 1985, Mohamed boarded a TWA flight from Athens to New York, the last leg of his journey to the U.S. Seated next to him on the plane was Linda Lee Sanchez, a medical technician from Santa Clara, California, a single woman about ten years older than Mohamed. Six weeks later the two were married at the Chapel of the Bells in Reno, Nevada. Mohamed subsequently moved in to Sanchez’ condo in Santa Clara and sought employment in the burgeoning technology sector of Silicon Valley. He got temporary work as a security guard at a computer company and made an abortive attempt at starting a home computer company of his own. By the summer of 1986,

¹⁵ Weiser and Risen, “The Masking of a Militant.” William Buckley, the CIA station chief kidnapped by Hezbollah in March of 1984, died in captivity the following year.

¹⁶ Weiser and Risen, “The Masking of a Militant”; Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 15f. (information from retired Special Agent Jack Cloonan).

¹⁷ Neff and Sullivan, “Al-Qaeda terrorist duped FBI, army”; Weiser and Risen, “The Masking of a Militant”; Jack Cloonan, quoted in Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Weiser and Risen, “The Masking of a Militant”; Williams and McCormick, “Al Qaeda terrorist worked with FBI.” See also the entry for September 1985 in Cooperative Research, “Profile: Ali Mohamed.”

¹⁹ Weiser, “U.S. Ex-Sergeant.”

²⁰ Quinn-Judge and Sennott, “Figure Cited in Terrorism Case”; citing otherwise un-identified “senior officials” of the U.S. government, the report stated that Mohamed was given a visa waiver under a “little known visa waiver program that allows the CIA and other security agencies to bring valuable agents into the country, bypassing the usual immigration formalities.” While perhaps “little known,” this authority was granted to the Director of National Intelligence by the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949 and codified in 50 U.S.C. §403h, which states that if “the admission of a particular alien into the United States for permanent residence is in the interest of national security or essential to the furtherance of the national intelligence mission, such alien and his immediate family shall be admitted to the United States for permanent residence without regard to their inadmissibility under the immigration or any other laws and regulations....” Thanks to Dan Coleman for directing me to this federal law.

Mohamed had applied for naturalized citizenship and was attending citizenship classes, while frequently taking short trips to South Asia to support the work of the EIJ there. He also made contacts with the local Muslim community and began during this period his collaborative operational relationship with Khalid Abu al-Dhahab, a fellow member of the EIJ who moved to Santa Clara in 1987.²¹

On August 15, 1986, Mohamed, still a resident alien, enlisted in the U.S. Army at a recruiting station in Oakland, using the name Ali Aboualacoud Mohamed. He did his basic training in A Company of the 4th Battalion at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.²² The thirty-four year old former Egyptian Special Forces major outperformed the other recruits and was given an Army Achievement Medal.²³ He may even have set an Army record for the two-mile run, which he did in under ten minutes.²⁴ He went through jump school and qualified as an expert marksman on the M-16, rising quickly to the rank of E-4. Mohamed was then surprisingly posted to the Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he had trained as a foreign officer several years before, and was promoted to the rank of supply sergeant to the Fifth Special Forces Group.²⁵ Soon thereafter he was recruited by Lt. Colonel Steve Neely to provide classes on the Middle East to students at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center.²⁶ In early 1989, he appeared in a series of training videos for the Special Warfare Center, frankly offering his militant Islamist perspective in round-table discussion forums on Middle Eastern issues.²⁷ Ali Mohamed, a man who had sworn allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri, was now serving in uniform alongside members of the Special Forces who would just three years later be deployed to hunt down al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan.

At some point while stationed at Fort Bragg Mohamed expressed interest to his superiors in doing intelligence work; a CIA representative posted there met with

²¹ His name is often spelled Abu'l-Dahab as well. See the articles by Williams and McCormick listed in the sources, below. Mohamed met Abu al-Dhahab in Egypt in 1984, when both of them were members of the Egyptian Army, and convinced him to become a “sleeper” agent in the U.S. In seeking citizenship he married a woman introduced to him by Linda Sanchez, Mohamed’s wife.

²² “Former GI Pleads Guilty”; Service record of Ali Aboualacoud Mohamed, as excerpted in Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, p. 103.

²³ His service records also state that he was awarded an Army Commendation Medal, which is described by the Department of Defense as being awarded to a member of the Armed Forces who “distinguished himself/herself by heroism, meritorious achievement or meritorious service.” (<http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/Awards/ARCOM1.html>).

²⁴ According to FBI Special Agent Cloonan (ret.), *apud* Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 33.

²⁵ Mohamed’s military service record, *apud* Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*, p. 103, and *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), closing remarks of defense attorney Roger Stavis, September 11, 1995, p. 19122, citing Mohamed’s service records. Fort Bragg is the headquarters of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and hosts, among other special forces, the elite anti-terrorism unit known as Delta Force.

²⁶ Colonel Norvell DeAtkine (ret.), who worked at the JFK Special Warfare Center at the same time as Mohamed, testified that “we had him [Mohamed] do cross-cultural lectures for soldiers who were deploying to the Middle East, on basically how to work with Arabs” (*U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), testimony of Colonel Norvell Bonds DeAtkine, July 13, 1995, p. 14181).

²⁷ According to the testimony of Col. DeAtkine, who was involved in the making of these training videos, the tapes were never used for instructional purposes at the Center, Col. DeAtkine having deemed them “too boring” (*U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), testimony of Colonel Norvell Bonds DeAtkine, July 13, 1995, p. 14171). Portions of one of the videos can be seen in the National Geographic documentary *Triple Cross*; a partial transcript of Mohamed’s statements in one of the videos is provided in Berger, *Ali Mohamed*, pp. 63ff.

Mohamed for about an hour and afterwards joked with an Army officer that Mohamed may have already been a “spook.”²⁸ Though there is no available evidence that the CIA engaged Mohamed as an asset at this time, his friends in the Muslim community back in California were under the impression that he was working for the Agency during this period in connection with the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan.²⁹

In the summer of 1988 Mohamed returned briefly to Egypt, this time in the uniform of a U.S. Army sergeant. He was sent with the Special Forces to take part in a biennial joint training exercise in Egypt run by U.S. Central Command known as Operation Bright Star.³⁰ As Mohamed had been an officer in the Egyptian Army, returning to his native soil in the uniform of a foreign government was viewed by the Egyptians as a treasonous act, and Mohamed was hurriedly sent back to North Carolina by his American superiors after only three days.³¹

Later that same year, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Anderson, Mohamed’s commanding officer at Fort Bragg, learned that Mohamed intended to use a requested leave to travel to Afghanistan and fight Soviet troops there.³² Mohamed had earlier contacted Mustafa Shalabi, who was at that time running the Al-Kifah Refugee Services Center in Brooklyn, New York,³³ and the latter transmitted a request from the mujahidin in Afghanistan that Mohamed come and provide military training.³⁴ His leave papers indicated he was simply going to Paris and were therefore approved, but Anderson confronted Mohamed and ordered him not to go to Afghanistan. After Mohamed left Anderson prepared an intelligence report on Mohamed and sent it up the chain of command, but never heard anything back.³⁵ Mohamed prepared a military plan before he left and actually submitted it to his colleagues for discussion. He also asked Captain Michael Asimos for unclassified maps of Afghanistan, which Mohamed claims he passed on to the mujahidin leader Ahmad Shah Massoud once he was in country.³⁶ After

²⁸ Weiser and Risen, “The Masking of a Militant.” (“Spook” is slang for a foreign espionage agent.) The un-named Army officer quoted in the article says that his response to this was that, “I just kind of laughed. How ridiculous that this guy [Mohamed] could possibly be a spook matriculating in this sort of bastion of special operations activity.”

²⁹ Waldman, *et al.*, “The Infiltrator”; Dr. Ali Zaki, a close friend of Mohamed at that time, is quoted in the article as saying that, “Everyone in the community knew he was working as a liaison between the CIA and the Afghan cause....”

³⁰ In 1988 Bright Star was a bilateral, American-Egyptian military exercise; it currently involves as many as 78,000 troops from as many as seventeen countries.

³¹ Daniel Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 2007. It wasn’t the only time that an Arab security service would express shock at Mohamed’s presence in the U.S. Special Forces; according to FBI Special Agent Jack Cloonan, a Jordanian military officer who visited the JFK Special Warfare Center during Mohamed’s tenure there “was flabbergasted when he saw Ali there” (Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 45).

³² Neff and Sullivan, “Al-Qaeda terrorist duped FBI, Army.”

³³ The Al-Kifah Center, which included the Al-Farooq Mosque, was at that time “a place of pivotal importance to Operation Cyclone, the American effort to support the mujahedin” (Marshall, “Terror ‘Blowback’ burns CIA”).

³⁴ Miller, *et al.*, *The Cell*, p. 143. According to the 1999 confession of Khalid Abu al-Dhahab, Mohamed first contacted Shalabi in 1987 (Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 43). The Al-Kifah Refugee Center was a hub in the EIJ’s network in the U.S.

³⁵ Neff and Sullivan, “Al-Qaeda terrorist duped FBI, Army.” Following Mohamed’s return Anderson submitted a second report, also unanswered. Lt. Col. Neely also submitted a report about Mohamed’s insubordinate Afghanistan trip, and likewise got no response (Miller, *et al.*, *The Cell*, p. 143).

³⁶ Neff and Sullivan, “Al-Qaeda terrorist duped FBI, Army”; Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 43 (information from Jack Cloonan).

spending around a month in Afghanistan, Mohamed returned to Fort Bragg. He'd clearly lost weight and had two Russian belts that he claimed to have taken off the bodies of Soviet soldiers he'd killed; he gave one of the belts to Lt. Col. Anderson as a gift.³⁷

Beginning in the spring or early summer of 1989, Mohamed began making weekend trips from Fort Bragg to New Jersey and New York to meet with EIJ members; his main objectives were to provide military training to an EIJ cell and to pass along documents and other sensitive materials that he'd stolen from his Army post.³⁸ On these trips he would often meet with Mustafa Shalabi at the Al-Kifah office in Brooklyn and with Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the blind leader of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya;³⁹ he stayed at the home of Sayyid Nosair during these trips and went by the alias "Abu Omar." The group that he provided training to included Sayyid Nosair, Mahmoud Abouhalima, Khaled Ibrahim, Mohammad Salameh, Clement Rodney Hampton-El, Nidal Ayyad and Ibrahim El-Gabrowni.⁴⁰ Mohamed provided initial military training in areas such as navigation, survival techniques and weapons identification in an apartment on Harrison Avenue in Jersey City, New Jersey, leased to Abdel Aziz Hassan.⁴¹ Later, the group would meet at the El Salaam Mosque in Jersey City and drive in several cars to a shooting range for training in the use of AK-47s and other weapons.⁴² These exercises took place at five different shooting ranges in upstate New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.⁴³ On each of the four Sundays between July 2 and July 23, 1989, the trainee group was followed and surveilled by a unit from the Special Operations Group of the FBI's New York Office as they proceeded to the Calverton Shooting Range on Long Island; the FBI secretly took dozens of photographs of the group firing off thousands of rounds, but soon thereafter the New York Office closed its file on the group.⁴⁴ One of its members, Sayyid Nosair, would go on to assassinate Rabbi Meir Kahane, a right-wing Israeli politician and founder of a number of terrorist organizations, in a Manhattan hotel on 5 November 1990; the murder weapon was a .357 Magnum that Noasir had been photographed firing at the Calverton Shooting Range the year before.

In addition to the military training, Mohamed used these trips to pass stolen documents from the JFK Special Warfare Center to his EIJ contacts. Some time in 1989, Sayyid Nosair screened Mohamed's training videos from Fort Bragg at the Al-Kifah

³⁷ Neff and Sullivan, "Al-Qaeda terrorist duped FBI, Army"; Mohamed told both Lt. Col. Anderson and FBI Special Agent Jack Cloonan that he had planned and executed a surprise attack on a unit of Spetsnaz, or Soviet special forces, and had killed many of them (Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 44).

³⁸ Miller, *et al.*, *The Cell*, pp. 143f.; Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 47ff.

³⁹ According to Miller, *et al.*, *The Cell*, p. 143f., Mohamed actually told Lt. Col. Neely at the JFK Special Warfare Center that he had renewed his association with Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman (whom he admitted knowing earlier in Egypt) during these trips.

⁴⁰ Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 47f. All of these men were part of the cell that carried out the February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and planned the so-called "Day of Terror" attacks, which were to include the bombing of the FBI Building in Washington, D.C., the United Nations building and key points of the New York City-area infrastructure.

⁴¹ *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), testimony of Khaled Ibrahim, July 13, 1995, pp. 14241f.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 14238ff.

⁴³ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Center in Jersey City;⁴⁵ Khaled Ibrahim testified that during Mohamed's first visit to the Al-Kifah office that summer he left training manuals clearly marked "United States Army, John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center."⁴⁶ Documents stolen by Mohamed and found by police in the home of Sayyid Nosair included operation manuals for various weapons, including assault rifles and antitank weapons; Special Forces special operations training manuals stamped "TOP SECRET"; ship docking locations for U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf; a Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) WARNING ORDER addressed to eight U.S. military command centers, the White House, the DIA, and the U.S. Embassies in Cairo, Khartoum, Mogadishu and Riyadh; and a document identifying the exact location of select Special Forces units on December 5, 1988.⁴⁷ Many of these documents have Arabic glosses and notes in Mohamed's handwriting.

Mohamed wasn't simply passing these stolen documents along; he was also using them, along with his extensive training and experience in covert operations, to write the al-Qa'ida training manual entitled "Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants." Discovered in a raid on the Manchester, U.K. home of al-Qa'ida leader Anas al-Liby in May of 2000, it was written by Mohamed some time in the late 1980s and consists of 180 pages of ideology, anecdote and detailed instructions on everything from setting up a terror cell to making counterfeit currency.⁴⁸ It also provides extensive guidance on living as a "sleeper" agent in a Western country; it is speculated that the 9/11 hijackers used the manual during their stays in the West.⁴⁹

Mohamed was honorably discharged from active duty on November 9, 1989.⁵⁰ Among the commendations in his file was one for "patriotism, valor, fidelity and professional excellence."⁵¹ He returned in early November to his wife's condo in Santa Clara, California and remained a member in the U.S. Army Reserves.⁵²

1990-1994: Working with al-Qa'ida's Africa Corps

Mohamed's return to California coincided with events rapidly unfolding in South Asia that would eventuate in the formal creation of al-Qa'ida and the attendant merging of Bin Ladin's resources and the networks of Zawahiri's EIJ.⁵³ From this point until his 1998 arrest, Mohamed was deeply involved in nearly every major al-Qa'ida enterprise.

⁴⁵ *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), testimony of Khaled Ibrahim, July 13, 1995, p. 14249.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14244.

⁴⁷ *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), testimony of Colonel Norvell Bonds DeAtkine, July 13, 1995; Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 55f., 545f.

⁴⁸ "Terror Manual is A-B-C Primer for Attackers"; Cooperative Research, "Profile: Ali Mohamed," entry under May 2000. An excerpt-in-translation of the manual can be found in Berger, *Ali Mohamed*, pp. 317-44.

⁴⁹ "Terror Manual is A-B-C Primer for Attackers"; Moutot, "Chilling manual for holy warriors."

⁵⁰ Service records of Ali Mohamed, as cited in *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), closing remarks of defense attorney Roger Stavis, September 11, 1995.

⁵¹ Neff and Sullivan, "Al-Qaeda terrorist duped FBI, Army."

⁵² Specifically he was then in the Individual Ready Reserves, so did not attend further training sessions with Reserve forces. Mohamed's former Army commanding officer, Lt. Col. Robert Anderson, told Lance (*Triple Cross*, p. 54) that he intends to seek a reversal of Mohamed's discharge status to "dishonorable."

⁵³ There are many accounts of these events, a particularly lucid example of which can be found in Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower*.

Upon his return to Santa Clara, Mohamed got a job as a security guard at the Sylvania plant in Mountain View, and registered a computer consulting firm as a home business; he frequented the An-Noor mosque in Santa Clara.⁵⁴ He also began to work together again with Khalid Abu al-Dhahab, who had come to California in 1987 upon being encouraged by Mohamed, “Come to America but be patient. There is a bigger plan.”⁵⁵ Abu al-Dhahab established an EIJ (subsequently al-Qa’ida) communications hub in his apartment in Santa Clara, patching calls between leaders in Egypt and operatives all over the world and sending money, passports and forged documents to various points in the global jihadi network.⁵⁶ Upon Mohamed’s discharge and return to California, Abu al-Dhahab’s communications and money-and-document transfer station increased its activities significantly. Abu al-Dhahab sent thousands of dollars given to him by Mohamed, which Abu al-Dhahab claimed came ultimately from Bin Ladin, to various parts of the world.⁵⁷

There are other indications that, beginning in 1989, Mohamed began to have a significant source or sources of unknown income, probably from al-Qa’ida. His salary from the Army would have been less than twenty thousand dollars a year, yet he owed the IRS \$10,500 for the 1988 and 1989 tax years, and didn’t repay the debt for another five years.⁵⁸ Such a tax burden proves that he was *reporting to the IRS* an income many times greater than what he received in Army Reserve benefits and part-time security guard work.

In 1990, Mohamed sent Abu al-Dhahab—who had earlier taken lessons at a flight school in operating gliders and helicopters—to Afghanistan to provide flight training at a camp there. He was in Afghanistan for four months.⁵⁹ Abu al-Dhahab returned with a new task for the Santa Clara duo: recruit naturalized citizens of Middle Eastern descent for the jihad.⁶⁰ Bin Ladin was particularly keen to get access to U.S. passports and other identity documents.⁶¹ Over the next two years, Mohamed would frequently travel to South Asia to provide a wide range of military training at several al-Qa’ida camps in Afghanistan and “guest houses” in Pakistan.

Also in 1990, Mohamed began his efforts to infiltrate the FBI. He applied to the FBI offices in Charlotte, North Carolina, and San Francisco for a job as a translator;

⁵⁴ Williams and McCormick, “Bin Laden’s Man in Silicon Valley”; Williams and McCormick, “Top bin Laden aide toured state.”

⁵⁵ Martin and Berens, “Terrorists evolved in U.S.”

⁵⁶ Williams, “Bin Laden’s Bay Area recruiter”; Martin and Berens, “Terrorists evolved in U.S.”; Williams and McCormick, “Ex-Silicon valley resident plotted embassy attacks.” Abu al-Dhahab was arrested in Cairo in 1998 and his confession and statements at his 1999 trial, at which he was sentenced to 15 years in Egyptian prison, provided much of the information for these news reports.

⁵⁷ Martin and Berens, “Terrorists evolved in U.S.”

⁵⁸ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 54.

⁵⁹ Sachs and Kifner, “Egyptian Raised Terror Funds in the U.S.” A friend remembers Abu al-Dhahab driving a station wagon with a hang glider in back into the An-Noor Mosque parking lot in Santa Clara, saying he intended to take it to Afghanistan; Abu al-Dhahab later testified that there was a (never realized) plot at the time to use gliders to attack Egyptian prisons and free imprisoned EIJ leaders (Williams, “Bin Laden’s Bay Area recruiter”).

⁶⁰ Williams, “Bin Laden’s Bay Area recruiter.”

⁶¹ At his later trial in Cairo, Abu al-Dhahab claimed that he and Mohamed were able to successfully recruit ten U.S. citizens of Middle Eastern descent during the early 1990s. He also revealed that he and Mohamed travelled to Afghanistan in the mid-1990s to be personally congratulated on this achievement by Bin Ladin; Williams, “Bin Laden’s Bay Area recruiter.”

though turned down by both offices, at his interview in San Francisco he told the FBI about a local document-forging ring with links to Hamas.⁶² Thus began Mohamed's relationship as a criminal informant for the FBI, which would deepen in the following years despite growing evidence of his involvement in Islamist terrorism. One very large body of such evidence was seized from Sayyid Nosair's apartment by the NYPD and the FBI on 6 November 1990, the day after Nosair assassinated Meir Kahane. In the forty-seven boxes of evidence taken from that apartment were dozens of documents that Mohamed had smuggled out of Fort Bragg, including copies of the training video with his picture plainly on the cover. Yet later that day, NYPD chief of detectives Joseph Borelli proclaimed that Nosair had acted as a "lone deranged gunman," and the investigation proceeded along those lines; the boxes of evidence were impounded and never even examined until after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.⁶³

In the spring of 1991, Mohamed was involved in the bloody resolution of an internal dispute that had existed since the beginning of al-Qa'ida. Some of the men who had led the mujahidin in Afghanistan against the Soviets in the 1980s were of the opinion that, following the victory over the Soviets, the next battlefield of the jihad should be in Palestine, while others felt the focus should be corrupt regimes in Muslim-majority states. The former camp was represented most prominently by `Abdullah `Azzam, while Bin Ladin favored the latter approach (though he would subsequently identify the West as the primary target of jihad). `Azzam's assassination in November of 1989 is thought by some to have been engineered by Bin Ladin because of this very dispute.⁶⁴ In any case, partisans of the two divergent views also existed in New York, the stateside center of the jihad. Mustafa Shalabi, with whom Mohamed had frequent contact during his trips to the area from Fort Bragg, was a close associate of `Azzam and shared his views on the primacy of the Palestinian conflict. Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, long in outspoken struggle with Shalabi over a host of issues (not least of which was the fact the Shalabi controlled the money coming into Al-Kifah for the anti-Soviet jihad), was the leading proponent in New York of Bin Ladin's view; as early as 1990 he declared that Shalabi was no longer a Muslim.⁶⁵ Fearing for his life, Shalabi confided in Mohamed, who contacted Shalabi's family in Egypt. Mohamed drove Shalabi's wife to the airport and saw her onto a flight for Cairo, and represented himself to Shalabi as making plans to secure the latter's escape as well.⁶⁶ During the night of February 26, however, while packing his belongings for his departure to Egypt, Shalabi was murdered in his apartment; he was beaten with a bat, stabbed repeatedly and then shot in the head.⁶⁷

⁶² Miller, *et al.*, *The Cell*, p. 144.

⁶³ Lance, *Triple Cross*, Ch. 6. Among Mohamed's papers seized in the Nosair apartment raid was one in which explicit mention was made of al-Qa'ida; had it been noticed and translated, it would have given U.S. law enforcement its earliest awareness of the organization, a full six years before it eventually became officially known. Mohamed would give another such opportunity in 1993, during his interview with Special Agent John Zent (see below).

⁶⁴ See Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, pp. 102ff.

⁶⁵ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 66; Tabor, "Slaying in Brooklyn Linked to Militants." Such a declaration, known as *takfir*, carries the implication that the excommunicant can (and should) be killed with impunity.

⁶⁶ Jack Cloonan, interview for National Geographic documentary *Triple Cross: Bin Laden's Spy in America*.

⁶⁷ Tabor, "Slaying in Brooklyn Linked to Militants"; JTTF investigator Tommy Corrigan, quoted in Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 67. Steven Emerson is quoted in Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 67, stating that he believed Mohamed was called in to be the "fixer" and clean up the apartment after the murder. Dan Coleman,

Police suspected that the slaying was ordered by Sheikh Abdel Rahman and carried out by three of Mohamed's trainees: Rodney Hampton-El, Mahmoud Abouhalima and Mohammed Salameh.⁶⁸ The Bin Ladin loyalist Wadih el-Hage, who arrived in New York immediately before the murder took place, took over direction of the Al-Kifah Center in Shalabi's place.⁶⁹

Mohamed's next assignment, in the summer of 1991, was to assist in Bin Ladin's relocation from Afghanistan to Khartoum, Sudan. Ironically, some time in early 1991, Bin Ladin had called Shalabi in order to communicate his desire for Mohamed's services in moving his entourage.⁷⁰ Mohamed called on two former associates, Essam Hafez Marzouk and Ihab Ali Nawawi, to assist him in the move.⁷¹ Mohamed had Bin Ladin and a core group of more than two thousand loyal mujahidin from the Arab world travel to Khartoum from Kabul via Peshawar and Karachi, Pakistan.⁷² After providing logistics and security for this huge and costly operation, Mohamed stayed on in Khartoum to assist in the establishment of training camps; he also provided training at these camps in "weapons, explosives, kidnapping, urban fighting, counterintelligence" and "how to set up cells."⁷³ He was also apparently commuting back to the U.S. during this period to recruit operatives for al-Qa'ida at American mosques.⁷⁴ From this point on he would work increasingly frequently with al-Qa'ida's Africa Corps.

Mohamed also continued to provide training to jihadi volunteers in surveillance and explosives at Bin Ladin's camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan during 1991 and '92. Mohamed's wife told acquaintances of theirs that her husband was in Afghanistan at this time "training people for a man named bin Laden";⁷⁵ the latter was virtually unknown in the U.S. at the time, and Linda Sanchez claims not to have had any idea who he was. One of Mohamed's New York-cell trainees, Khaled Ibrahim, testified to "coincidentally" meeting Mohamed at Kennedy International Airport as the latter returned to the U.S. from Pakistan in late 1991 or early 1992; Mohamed stayed a night at Ibrahim's home and then left for California from the Newark Airport.⁷⁶ Some time in 1992, L'Houssaine Kherchtou was sent by al-Qa'ida commander Abu Hafs to be trained by Mohamed with a group of students that included Anas al-Liby, Saif al-Liby and other Libyans in an advanced course in surveillance; the training was held in Bin Ladin's house in Hyatabad, a neighborhood in Peshawar, Pakistan. Kherchtou remembered Mohamed as "very strict and not gentle," "a severe man, not very observant," who was foul-mouthed and "not a

however, points out that the apartment was not in fact "fixed" at all, that it was literally a bloody mess, and that at no point during the investigation of the murder was Mohamed suspected of direct involvement (interview with the author, 27 August 2007).

⁶⁸ Tabor, "Inquiry into Slaying of Sheik's Confidant Appears Open."

⁶⁹ Dan Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 2007; Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 104.

⁷⁰ Engelberg, "One Man and a Global Web of Violence."

⁷¹ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 123.

⁷² Weiser, "Informer's Part in Terror Case is Detailed."

⁷³ Engelberg, "One Man and a Global Web of Violence."

⁷⁴ Weiser and Risen, "The Masking of a Militant."

⁷⁵ Williams and McCormick, "Bin Laden's Man in Silicon Valley."

⁷⁶ *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), testimony of Khaled Ibrahim, July 13, 1995, pp. 14281ff.

good practitioner of Islam.”⁷⁷ Mohamed used various aliases during the two-week training, including Bakhbola, Bili Bili and Haydara, and was assisted by a fellow-Egyptian trainer named Adnan.⁷⁸ Mohamed proceeded from this training to provide another course at the Jihad Wal camp in Afghanistan.⁷⁹ In around September of 1992, Khaled Ibrahim saw Mohamed at Khaldan, an al-Qa’ida training camp near Khost, Afghanistan, training al-Qa’ida’s senior leadership. Among the areas of instruction was the use of Stinger missiles. Mohamed was there for three or four weeks and used the alias Abu Osama.⁸⁰ At his plea hearing, Mohamed admitted to having provided military and explosives training for al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan in 1992, and listed among his trainees `Abdullah Muhammad Fazul (aka Harun Fazul) and Abu Jihad.⁸¹ Over the course of numerous trips to South Asia during the 1990s Mohamed provided training of various kinds to virtually the entire al-Qa’ida leadership structure, including Bin Ladin, Zawahiri, Abu Ubaydah al-Banshiri and Muhammad Atef.⁸²

In November of 1991, an attacker connected to al-Qa’ida and masquerading as a journalist stabbed Mohammad Zahir Shah, the former king of Afghanistan, in the throat at Zahir Shah’s villa in northern Rome.⁸³ After the unsuccessful assassination attempt, Mohamed was sent to Italy to investigate. He collected articles from Italian newspapers about the incident and brought them to L’Houssaine Kherchtou in Nairobi to be translated.⁸⁴

Beginning in 1992, Mohamed was tasked with helping to set up the al-Qa’ida cell in Nairobi, Kenya, that would bomb the U.S. Embassy there six years later. Abu Ubaydah al-Banshiri was the leader of the cell; Khalid al-Fawwaz set up their Nairobi offices; and Mohamed worked with Wadih el-Hage in establishing a charity front and several local businesses to generate income, including a car business. Mohamed and el-Hage forged and otherwise procured identity documents in el-Hage’s Nairobi home, which was also the location for meetings between Mohamed, el-Hage, Abu Hafs and Abu Ubaydah.⁸⁵ Mohamed also traded in diamonds and Tanzanite and helped import trucks for the cell’s use.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Taken alongside Dan Coleman’s observation that Mohamed was not outwardly pious while in U.S. custody, this testimony indicates that those who saw a deep religiosity in Mohamed may only have been seeing what he wanted them to see.

⁷⁸ *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., testimony of L’Houssaine Kherchtou, February 21, 2001, pp. 1139ff.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1149.

⁸⁰ *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), testimony of Khaled Ibrahim, July 13, 1995, pp. 14291-14293; *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Sealed Complaint, September 1998, affidavit of Special Agent Daniel Coleman (hereafter “Coleman Affidavit”), p. 6.

⁸¹ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 26.

⁸² “Statement of Patrick J. Fitzgerald United States Attorney Northern District of Illinois Before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States,” June 16, 2004, *apud* Berger, *Ali Mohamed*, p. 348.

⁸³ Cowell, “Afghan’s Ex-King Stabbed in Rome.”

⁸⁴ *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., remarks of Patrick Fitzgerald, 1152.

⁸⁵ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 26.

⁸⁶ Coleman Affidavit, p. 10.

In the summer of 1992, Mohamed was briefly detained by authorities at the Leonardo Da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport in Rome, suspicions having been raised by secret compartments in his luggage; he had a Coca-Cola can with a hidden storage area.⁸⁷ He claimed to the airport interrogators that he was on “their side” in counterterrorism and that he was a security agent for the Summer Olympics in Spain; apparently convinced, the airport authorities released him.⁸⁸ According to Mohamed’s wife, the two of them had just vacationed together briefly in Barcelona, Mohamed having come there from “the Middle East” and en route back to wherever he had come from (presumably Afghanistan) at the time of the Rome arrest. TWA, who operated the flight that Mohamed was to take out of Rome, reported the incident to the FBI. As a result, Mohamed was later “opened” as a 134 Foreign Counter Intelligence agent, tasked with gathering intelligence to support a FISA application for a wire tap on suspects at a California mosque.⁸⁹ His control agent in the FBI was a recent recruit and did not have Mohamed take a polygraph test; soon thereafter the young agent was transferred to something else and Mohamed was assigned to Special Agent John Zent (currently retired). Zent used Mohamed primarily as a criminal informant.⁹⁰ Though Zent would “control” Mohamed as an informant for a number of years, he never discovered that Mohamed was a double agent using *him*.

In the spring of 1993, Mohamed and Khalid Abu al-Dhahab hosted Ayman al-Zawahiri on a fund-raising tour of area mosques.⁹¹ Zawahiri had come into the U.S. using forged papers supplied to him by Mohamed; while in America he used the pseudonym Dr. Abdel Muez and portrayed himself as a representative of the Red Crescent of Kuwait’s humanitarian mission in Pakistan.⁹² Mohamed and Abu al-Dhahab brought Zawahiri to raise funds at mosques in Santa Clara, Stockton and Sacramento.⁹³ Mohamed introduced Zawahiri to Dr. Ali Zaki, a San Jose gynecologist and civic leader; Zaki claims that during the time he spent with Zawahiri touring mosques they spoke mostly about medical problems Zawahiri was encountering as a doctor in Afghanistan.⁹⁴ Zawahiri returned to Santa Clara for another fund raising mission in 1995; earlier that year he placed four calls to Abu al-Dhahab to ask about the price of satellite phones.⁹⁵ According to Abu al-Dhahab’s later testimony, this second trip resulted in only \$2,500 in raised funds, which went toward the costs of carrying out the bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, in November of that year.⁹⁶

⁸⁷ According to Linda Sanchez, “It was just a Coke can that he picked up at the Spy Shop in San Francisco and thought his friends would get a kick out of it.” Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 95.

⁸⁸ Weiser and Risen, “The Masking of a Militant.”

⁸⁹ Jack Cloonan, quoted in Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 95.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, and Dan Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 2007.

⁹¹ Wright, “The Man Behind Bin Ladin”; Sachs and Kifner, “Egyptian raised terror funds in U.S.”; Williams and McCormick “Top bin Laden aide toured state.”

⁹² Lacayo, “Public Enemy no. 2”; Wright, “The Man Behind Bin Ladin.”

⁹³ Williams and McCormick, “Top bin Laden aide toured state.”

⁹⁴ Zaki disputes the FBI’s account of the 1993 Zawahiri visit, claiming that it occurred in 1989 or ’90; he also claims that the fund-raising mission was not very successful, yielding at most a few hundred dollars (Wright, “The Man Behind Bin Ladin”).

⁹⁵ Sachs and Kifner, “Egyptian Raised Terror Funds in U.S.”

⁹⁶ Williams and McCormick, “Top bin Laden aide toured state”; Sachs and Kifner, “Egyptian Raised Terror Funds in U.S.” Zawahiri was in the U.S. for weeks during this later visit and travelled to other states, including Texas; Williams and McCormick, “Top bin Laden aide toured state,” and other sources indicate

Not long after Zawahiri's 1993 visit, Mohamed traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia, to help his associate Essam Marzouk—who'd helped Mohamed move Bin Ladin to Sudan—enter the United States. Some time in June, Marzouk had flown into Vancouver from Damascus, Syria, via Frankfurt on Lufthansa Flight 492.⁹⁷ Marzouk claimed to be seeking asylum from religious persecution in Egypt, but his plan was to have Mohamed, who was waiting in the parking lot, drive him over the border to the U.S. Airport authorities discovered in his luggage two forged Saudi passports—one of them with Marzouk's picture—and detained him. As the Royal Canadian Mounted Police began questioning Marzouk, Mohamed came in to the airport customs office seeking information on his colleague; the RCMP decided to question him as well. Mohamed told the RCMP that he was connected to the FBI and gave them the telephone number of Special Agent John Zent. Mohamed was still working during this period as a criminal informant for Zent, feeding him information about a Mexican human-smuggling ring.⁹⁸ After the RCMP placed a call to Zent, Mohamed was told he could go but was asked to return the following day for another interview. Mohamed did come back, his car was searched, and, according to an affidavit he wrote at the time, "They found nothing. I left Canada at 4:30 p.m. for the States."⁹⁹ Marzouk was detained for nearly a year, but was eventually released and settled in Canada until 1998, at which point he went to fight in the Balkans; he is currently in Egyptian prison.¹⁰⁰ At some time during Marzouk's detainment in Vancouver, Mohamed delivered \$3,000 that had been sent to him by Abu al-Dhahab—who later testified to having received it from bin Ladin—to help cover Marzouk's legal fees.¹⁰¹

After Mohamed returned to California, Special Agent Zent sought a follow-up interview with him at the FBI's San Francisco office.¹⁰² During this interview Mohamed "told Special Agents of the FBI that Usama Bin Laden ran an organization called al Qaeda and was building an army which may be used to overthrow the Saudi Government"; that "Bin Laden was operating camps in the Sudan" at which Mohamed himself provided training; and that he had given "anti-hijacking and intelligence training in Afghanistan" to Essam Marzouk.¹⁰³ Zent contacted local representatives of military intelligence about Mohamed's disclosures and a team of investigators from the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command at Fort Meade arrived shortly thereafter.¹⁰⁴ According to Special Agent Jack Cloonan (ret.), the Fort Meade investigators "bring maps and they bring evidence.... And so they debrief Ali, and he lays out all these

that Zawahiri may have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in all, so Abu al-Dhahab's figure of twenty-five hundred dollars may refer solely to monies raised at the An-Noor Mosque in Santa Clara.
⁹⁷ Ha and Freeze, "Canadian soil a long-time staging ground for al-Qaeda"; Oziewicz and Ha, "Canada freed top al-Qaeda operative."

⁹⁸ Weiser and Risen, "The Masking of a Militant."

⁹⁹ Oziewicz and Ha, "Canada freed top al-Qaeda operative."

¹⁰⁰ Ha and Freeze, "Canadian soil a long-time staging ground for al-Qaeda."

¹⁰¹ Martin and Berens, "Terrorists evolved in U.S."

¹⁰² The reporting on the Vancouver incident places it in June, while some sources (e.g., Miller, *et al.*, *The Cell*, p. 145) date Zent's follow-up interview to May, 1993, a clear discrepancy; the Coleman Affidavit simply dates these events "in 1993."

¹⁰³ Coleman Affidavit, p. 7. Despite having this information, no law enforcement agency made any moves on Marzouk, who would live freely in Canada for another five years.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 2007.

training camps.”¹⁰⁵ Years later, when Cloonan was investigating Mohamed’s background and sought the military intelligence report on this meeting, he was told that “the report was probably destroyed in a reorganization of intelligence components within the Department of Defense.”¹⁰⁶ Mohamed, who failed a polygraph test administered by the government, was released.¹⁰⁷ He had given the U.S. government its first glimpse of the al-Qa’ida network, yet, “inexplicably, that interview never found its way to the F.B.I. investigators in New York.”¹⁰⁸ However, Mohamed’s movements and phone calls were from this point on monitored by an unidentified agency of the U.S. government.¹⁰⁹

1993 and 1994 saw Mohamed carrying out a wide variety of tasks for al-Qa’ida in Africa. In early fall he was in Somalia helping to train al-Qa’ida and allied fighters loyal to Farah Aideded; the mujahidin involved in the “Black Hawk Down” incident in Mogadishu in October may have been among Mohamed’s trainees.¹¹⁰ Abu al-Dhahab later claimed that Mohamed personally took part in attacks on American troops in Somalia.¹¹¹ In late 1993 Mohamed was asked by Bin Ladin to do surveillance of possible American, British, French and Israeli targets in Nairobi that could be attacked in retaliation for U.S. involvement in Somalia.¹¹² He was assisted by Anas al-Liby.¹¹³ Among the locations that they photographed were the U.S. Embassy, the USAID building, the U.S. Agricultural Office, the French Embassy and the French Cultural Center. Khalid al-Fawwaz, who was in Nairobi at the time, paid for the expenses and camera equipment. The photographs were developed in the Nairobi apartment of L’Houssaine Kherchtou.¹¹⁴ Later in 1993 or early 1994, in Khartoum, Mohamed showed Bin Ladin his pictures of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi; Bin Ladin identified the precise point on the photos to drive a truck bomb up to, the exact spot that was targeted in 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 130. Cloonan’s and Coleman’s knowledge of this meeting comes from later interviews with John Zent and interrogations of Ali Mohamed (Coleman interview with author).

¹⁰⁶ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁷ Waldman, *et al.*, “The Infiltrator.” The same article notes that, “even though that interview occurred after the World Trade Center blast, and after Mr. Mohamed’s U.S. training manuals already had been found in Mr. Nosair’s possession, Mr. Mohamed was let go without further investigation.”

¹⁰⁸ Wright, “The Man Behind Bin Laden.” Agent Zent did not make any written record of Mohamed’s disclosures about al-Qa’ida at this time, nor did he report such to the FBI’s New York Office; the latter would first learn about this more than three years later (Coleman interview with the author, 27 August 2007). An earlier opportunity to learn the name of al-Qa’ida came in 1992, when U.S. law enforcement officials seized a bomb-making manual from Ahmad Ajaj at JFK International Airport that bore the name “al-Qa’ida” on the cover in Arabic; it was mistranslated by federal agents as “The Basic Rule” (Engelberg, “One Man and a Global Web of Violence”).

¹⁰⁹ Weiser and Risen, “The Masking of a Militant.” The FBI would not begin monitoring Mohamed’s calls until 1998; Coleman interview with author, and see *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., February 21, 2001, testimony of FBI Agent Michael Ernst.

¹¹⁰ Engelberg, “One Man and a Global Web of Violence”; Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 142.

¹¹¹ Sachs, “An Investigation in Egypt Illustrates Al Qaeda’s Web.” During interrogation between September of 1998 and October of 2000, Mohamed repeatedly denied any involvement in the “Black Hawk Down” incident; having pled guilty to numerous counts of conspiracy to murder, involving hundreds of victims, he had at that time “no reason to lie” about this particular incident; Dan Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 2007.

¹¹² *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 27.

¹¹³ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 145 (information from Special Agent [ret.] Jack Cloonan).

¹¹⁴ *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., testimony of L’Houssaine Kherchtou, February 21, 2001, pp. 1188ff.

Mohamed was then sent by Bin Ladin to Djibouti to do similar surveillance work on French military bases and the U.S. Embassy there.¹¹⁵ After the February 1994 attempt on Bin Ladin's life in Khartoum, Zawahiri called Mohamed in to train a new security detail.¹¹⁶ Mohamed admitted to having "trained those conducting the security of the interior of his [sc. Bin Ladin's] compound, and coordinated with the Sudanese intelligence agents who were responsible for the exterior security."¹¹⁷ He also provided further training in surveillance to al-Qa'ida personnel in Khartoum at this time, including Ihab Ali Nawawi. At some point in 1994 Mohamed was sent to Algeria with money from Bin Ladin in order to secure the release of an al-Qa'ida operative from jail there.¹¹⁸ Mohamed, who had turned on the CIA for Hezbollah back in Germany in 1984, also helped broker at this time a meeting between Bin Ladin and Imad Mughniyah, a senior Hezbollah military leader; Mohamed arranged for the security at this "terror summit," details of which are unknown.¹¹⁹ On August 14, 1994, the term of Mohamed's reserve obligation to the United States Army Reserve expired.¹²⁰

In the first week of December, 1994, Mohamed met with Abu Hafs (aka Muhammad Atef) and another operative in the home of Wadih el-Hage in Nairobi; Abu Hafs asked Mohamed to go to Senegal and do surveillance of possible American, British, French and Israeli targets there. Days later, however, he received a call from the U.S. that effectively ended his tenure with the Africa Corps.

1994-1998: al-Qa'ida's Spy in America

In 1994 Roger Stavis, the defense attorney for Sayyid Nosair for the then-upcoming *United States v. Abdel Rahman* "Day of Terror" trial, discovered the link to Mohamed in the materials that had been taken from Nosair's apartment in 1990. Hoping to use

¹¹⁵ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 27.

¹¹⁶ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, pp. 27f.; Wright, *The Looming Tower*, pp. 192f.

¹¹⁷ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Sachs, "An Investigation in Egypt Illustrates Al Qaeda's Web." During interrogation, Mohamed refused to answer questions about this trip to Algeria (Dan Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 2007).

¹¹⁹ This is often said in reportage of the meeting (e.g., Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 140) to have taken place in 1993; the only source for this meeting, however, is Mohamed's statement during his October 2000 plea hearing, in which he does not identify the date but clearly indicates in surrounding context that it occurred in 1994. There has been a great deal of speculation that this meeting had something to do with the later bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, believed to have been carried out by Hezbollah; see Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 140. Abdel Bari Atwan, editor of the London-based Arabic newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi*, writes in *The Secret History of al Qaeda* that a meeting of the "Arab Islamic People's Conference" was called by Bin Ladin and hosted in Khartoum in 1991, and was attended by Imad Mughniyah (among other prominent Islamist and jihadi personalities); according to Atwan, who attended the conference, its purpose was "to provide an alternative to the Arab League and a platform for all who rejected the 1991 US intervention against Iraq and opposed the Arab regimes which supported" it (Atwan, *Secret History*, p. 48).

¹²⁰ Service records of Ali Mohamed, as cited in *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), closing remarks of defense attorney Roger Stavis, September 11, 1995.

Mohamed and his connections to the U.S. military and intelligence communities as part of a “blowback” defense for his client, Stavis issued a subpoena for Mohamed and invoked the Classified Information Procedures Act, used for getting witness testimony in potentially classified matters.¹²¹ Still unaware of the extent to which their “asset” was double-dealing with them, the Justice Department decided it needed to talk to Mohamed before he appeared in open court in New York. Prosecuting AUSA Andrew McCarthy directed Special Agent Harlan Bell of the New York Office to communicate to John Zent in San Francisco that he wanted to arrange a meeting; Zent called Mohamed’s wife Linda Sanchez, who relayed the message to Abu al-Dhahab, who phoned Wadih el-Hage’s home in Nairobi to tell Mohamed.¹²² Mohamed later testified that he was called in Nairobi by “an FBI agent who wanted to speak to me about the upcoming trial of *United States v. Abdel Rahman*.”¹²³

Mohamed cancelled his plans to do surveillance in Senegal and, on December 9, 1994, he returned to the U.S. That same day he met with Special Agent Harlan Bell and AUSA Andrew McCarthy at the San Jose offices of the FBI.¹²⁴ Mohamed told them that he was working in Kenya in a scuba diving business and admitted he’d made prior trips to Pakistan, one in 1988 and another in 1991; the latter trip, Mohamed said, was at the request of Mustafa Shalabi, who asked him to go and help move Bin Ladin out of Afghanistan.¹²⁵ At his plea hearing, Mohamed admitted that during this interview he “didn’t disclose everything that I knew.”¹²⁶ Sometime either at that meeting or in the ensuing weeks, McCarthy and Mohamed reached some sort of agreement; on December 22, McCarthy faxed a letter “concerning the subpoena that had been served upon Ali Mohamed” and, later the same day, received a fax in response bearing Mohamed’s signature.¹²⁷ That letter has never been made public, but whatever its nature, Mohamed did not appear at the “Day of Terror” trial in New York.¹²⁸ Mohamed reported his meeting at the San Jose FBI office to Abu Hafs and was told by the latter not to return to Africa.¹²⁹

¹²¹ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 172.

¹²² Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 173; *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Gov. Exhibit 153, Stipulations regarding Government contacts with Ali Mohamed.

¹²³ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 28. According to the Dan Coleman, FBI Special Agent Harlan Bell, who speaks Arabic, placed the call to Mohamed in Nairobi (interview with the author, 27 August 2007), so it may be that both Linda Sanchez and Harlan Bell.

¹²⁴ *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Gov. Exhibit 153, Stipulations regarding Government contacts with Ali Mohamed.

¹²⁵ Coleman Affidavit, p. 8.

¹²⁶ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, pp. 28f.

¹²⁷ *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Gov. Exhibit 153, Stipulations regarding Government contacts with Ali Mohamed.

¹²⁸ Ibrahim El-Gabrowni, one of Mohamed’s shooting-range trainees and a cousin of Sayyid Nosair, wrote in his filings for appeal of his conviction in the Day of Terror case that, when he and Mohamed were in adjacent cells for a period in 1999 in the Manhattan Correctional Center, Mohamed told El-Gabrowni that McCarthy had advised him during their San Jose meeting to ignore the subpoena (Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 175f.).

¹²⁹ L’Houssaine Kherchtou testified that Abu Hafs was already suspicious of Mohamed, and asked at one point in 1994 that other cell members in Nairobi not tell Mohamed what pseudonym Abu Hafs was travelling under; when asked about this by Kherchtou, Abu Hafs told him that he suspected Mohamed of

Though thus ending his career with the Africa Corps, this was not the end of Mohamed's services for al-Qa'ida. As described above, Mohamed assisted Zawahiri in a fund-raising mission to California at some point in 1995. He also maintained contact with Wadih el-Hage in Nairobi and passed on relevant intelligence whenever he could. In early 1995, he obtained a copy of the unindicted co-conspirator's list for the "Day of Terror" trial and sent it along to el-Hage, with the understanding that it would be forwarded to Bin Ladin in Khartoum.¹³⁰ The 172-person list, which included Mohamed and Bin Ladin, provided al-Qa'ida with a picture of the extent to which the U.S. was aware of its global network.¹³¹

In January of 1995, Mohamed "sought a security clearance to work as a security guard at a classified area within a facility maintained by a private company that did business on behalf of the Department of Defense."¹³² He filled out a questionnaire for the Defense Investigative Service (DIS) and had an interview with DIS personnel; he did this again in late August and a third time in early November of 1995. He gave conflicting and false information in these statements, such as omitting in the January questionnaire that he'd traveled to Sudan and Somalia, while admitting that he'd recently traveled to Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kenya. He claimed that his travels abroad were done in connection with an import/export business and stated that the only people he had contact with outside the U.S. were his two blood brothers. In his final statement, dated 8 November 1995, he claimed that:

I have never belonged to a terrorist organization but I have been approached by organizations that could be called terrorist. I would prefer to call these organizations "opposition groups" because they were opposing terrorist governments.¹³³

While he was ultimately unsuccessful in his bid for a security clearance, he was nevertheless able to get work as a Burns Security guard during this period at a Northrop-Grumman facility in Sunnyvale, California, that manufactured components for the Trident missile.¹³⁴

In February 1995, in the midst of the "Day of Terror" trial against Nosair, an article in the Boston Globe revealed that Mohamed had been a sergeant in the U.S. Special Forces, that he had connections to jihadi groups and provided training to the "Day of Terror" cell in New York and New Jersey, and that he had first come to the U.S. "in the early or mid-1980s under clandestine CIA sponsorship."¹³⁵ In the fall of 1995, Nosair's defense attorney in the "Day of Terror" trial requested a missing witness

working for the U.S. or "other governments"; *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., testimony of L'Houssaine Kherchtou, February 22, 2001, p. 1261.

¹³⁰ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 29.

¹³¹ A copy of the list is included as Appendix X in Lance, *Triple Cross*.

¹³² Coleman Affidavit, p. 8.

¹³³ Coleman Affidavit, pp. 8f.

¹³⁴ Lance, *Triple Cross*, p. 207 (information from retired Special Agent Jack Cloonan). Cloonan stated that when he interviewed Northrup-Grumman personnel about Mohamed's possible level of access there, he was told that Mohamed "never got access to sensitive information." However, Mohamed told Cloonan that the former was able while working there to walk around the facility and had access to a computer terminal.

¹³⁵ Quinn-Judge and Sennott, "Figure Cited in Terrorism Case Said to Enter US with CIA Help."

instruction for Mohamed; he stated that he'd contacted Mohamed's wife in California but that the latter "hadn't seen him for over a year."¹³⁶

At some time after 1995, according to testimony of Khalid Abu al-Dhahab, Mohamed may have had a falling out with al-Qa'ida. Abu al-Dhahab claimed that Mohamed "ran afoul of the bin Laden organization after 1995 because of a murky dispute involving money and was no longer trusted by bin Laden lieutenants."¹³⁷ However, in May of 1996 Mohamed was called in yet again to provide security for bin Ladin's move, this time from Sudan back to Afghanistan.¹³⁸ In January of 1998, Mohamed again demonstrated his loyalty when, after receiving a letter from Ihab Ali Nawawi indicating that Wadih el-Hage had been interviewed by the FBI in Kenya, Mohamed made arrangements for this information to make its way to Bin Ladin.¹³⁹

In 1997, Mohamed and his wife moved to Sacramento, where he got a job at a video distribution company.¹⁴⁰ That October, in a bid to get Mohamed to cooperate more closely with the government, AUSA Patrick Fitzgerald arranged a meeting with Mohamed. Along with Special Agents Harlan Bell and Jack Cloonan, both of the New York I-49 squad working the Bin Ladin case, Fitzgerald met Mohamed at a restaurant in Sacramento. The meeting lasted several hours, and over the course of it Mohamed admitted to a long list of his al-Qa'ida activities. He said he'd helped Bin Ladin move to Sudan and trained Bin Ladin's security people in Khartoum; that he was in Somalia during the "Black Hawk Down" incident and that Bin Ladin's operatives had been responsible for killing U.S. soldiers there; he even told the three senior law enforcement officials that he "did not need a fatwah to go against the United States since it was 'obvious' that the United States was the enemy."¹⁴¹ Despite this open declaration of treason—Mohamed being a U.S. citizen by this time—he was allowed to get up and walk away from the meeting and was not arrested. Instead, FISA warrants were obtained and the FBI's Sacramento office bugged Mohamed's Sacramento phone as well as his computer.¹⁴² Unfortunately, whatever intelligence was garnered from this surveillance was insufficient to thwart al-Qa'ida's next major attack.

On August 7, 1998, al-Qa'ida's Africa Corps carried out near-simultaneous bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar as Salaam, Tanzania, killing hundreds and wounding thousands; as of that date, Mohamed had made 58 trips from America overseas.¹⁴³

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¹³⁶ *U.S.A. v. Omar Abdel Rahman et al.*, S(5) 93 Cr. 181 (MBM), September 1, 1995, pp. 18418-18419. Recalling that the court had earlier seen Mohamed "on that splendid videotape," Judge Michael B. Mukasey rejected the defense's request, saying, "I don't think a missing witness charge on that gentleman is warranted and I'm not going to give one."

¹³⁷ Sachs, "An Investigation in Egypt Illustrates Al Qaeda's Web."

¹³⁸ Sullivan and Neff, "Al-Qaeda Terrorist duped FBI, Army."

¹³⁹ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 29.

¹⁴⁰ Williams and McCormick, "Bin Laden's Man in Silicon Valley."

¹⁴¹ Coleman Affidavit, p. 9. Details of the meeting are provided by Special Agent Jack Cloonan (ret.), who was present, in Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 274f.

¹⁴² *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., February 21, 2001, testimony of FBI Agent Michael Ernst.

¹⁴³ Martin and Berens, "Terrorists evolved in U.S."

After the bombings, Mohamed made arrangements to proceed from California to Afghanistan via Egypt. Before he could leave he was subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury in the Southern District of New York.¹⁴⁴ On September 10, 1998, after appearing before the grand jury and perjuring himself, Mohamed was secretly arrested.¹⁴⁵ On May 19, 1999, he was indicted on federal charges that he provided training to members of al-Qa'ida and pled guilty to five counts of conspiracy.¹⁴⁶ On October 20, 2000, Mohamed pled guilty to involvement in the 1998 Embassy bombings. He has not been sentenced, and is in the custody of the U.S. Government at an unknown location. His arrangement with the government requires that he cooperate with authorities in the fight against al-Qa'ida, and he has been a source of much valuable information.¹⁴⁷ According to his wife Linda Sanchez, "Nobody can get to him."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ Though the charges were filed under seal, the New York Times learned of the arrest and reported on it in October, 1998; see Weiser, "U.S. Ex-Sergeant Linked to bin Laden Conspiracy."

¹⁴⁶ "Ex-GI Indicted in bin Laden Terror Case"; *United States of America v. Ali Mohamed*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., Plea Hearing, October 20, 2000.

¹⁴⁷ Dan Coleman, interview with the author, 27 August 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Lance, *Triple Cross*, pp. 23f.

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