

## Terrorism - The Net Tightens On Al-Qa'eda Cells

The U.S. and Pakistan hail the arrest of the suspected mastermind of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington as a major breakthrough. They hope he will lead them to other terrorists. But his capture raises serious questions about the dependability of the Pakistani military.

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Ahmed Rashid/Islamabad

While the arrest in a Rawalpindi suburb of the suspected operations chief of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States is being hailed as a major breakthrough in the war against terrorism, it promises to open up a can of worms in Pakistan and almost certainly won't prevent attacks from his acolytes and other militants in the future.

But Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's apprehension on March 1 should also bring President Pervez Musharraf some respite from American pressure to vote for a U.S.-British resolution on war in Iraq at the United Nations Security Council, of which Pakistan is one of 10 alternate members. And it will likely cause turmoil among Al Qaeda agents fearful that they have been compromised. Intelligence agencies hope this disruption will force operatives around the world to seek new bolt-holes and give the agencies a major opportunity to nab them. "Mohammed knew everyone who passed through Al Qaeda camps over the past 10 years and he knows everyone who is still free and out there ready to carry out more terrorist attacks," says a Western security official.

When Pakistani intelligence agents and U.S. Central Intelligence Agency operatives caught up with Mohammed, Al Qaeda's self-described military leader, he was sleeping in a house in Rawalpindi, which is close to the capital, Islamabad. The Westridge area is within a few minutes' drive of the national headquarters of the Pakistani army and is home to hundreds of senior officers, including serving and retired generals.

Also arrested were another Arab, identified in the U.S. press as Mustafa Ahmed al-Hawsawi, and Ahmad Abdul Qadoos, the owner of the house and a member of the country's biggest mainstream political party, Jamaat-e-Islami. Pakistan police were also questioning Ahmad's brother, a major in the Pakistan army.

Both the Americans and the Pakistanis trumpeted the arrests as a major breakthrough. "The man who masterminded the September 11 attacks is no longer a problem," said U.S. President George W. Bush, describing Mohammed as Al Qaeda's top operational planner and "top killer."

Western intelligence agencies believe Kuwaiti-born Mohammed was No. 3 in the Al Qaeda hierarchy after Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahri. The U.S. government had offered a reward of \$25 million for the capture of Mohammed, whom they suspect was involved in many other attacks. (See story on page 14.)

Western officials in Islamabad say they had received intelligence that Mohammed was planning "something big," which prompted the U.S. to upgrade a national security alert in February and Britain to send troops to protect London's busy Heathrow Airport.

Now the Americans and other governments, especially in Asia, want to find out what he has to say. The CIA whisked Mohammed out of the country after questioning by the Pakistanis. Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat said the suspect had cooperated with interrogators. He predicted "significant developments," but gave no details.

The U.S. intelligence services will be in a race to make Mohammed talk even more in order to uncover the identity and whereabouts of terrorist groups in North America, Europe and Southeast Asia and to act against them before they scatter or carry out acts of terrorism in revenge for his capture.

And intelligence officials in Southeast Asia and Australia are waiting to see if the cells he left behind can function without him. They consider Jemaah Islamiah, an Indonesia-based militant organization, to be among the most dangerous. Investigators say Jemaah was responsible for executing the deadly Bali bombings in October on his behalf. But other groups exist on the Asian periphery of Al Qaeda, all of which are capable of acting alone.

"We're worried that with the arrest of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the decision-making process within Al Qaeda will be devolved," says an intelligence officer based in the Philippines, where Muslim separatist groups with links to Al Qaeda have in the past trained militants from the region and beyond.

Philippine security officials are keeping a close eye on these groups after a bomb killed 21 people, including one American, after it exploded outside an airport in the southern Philippines on March 4. Indeed, investigators in Manila say that though Mohammed's arrest may delay future terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia, it won't stop them. "The groups here, the Abu Sayyaf, the Jemaah Islamiyah, are driven by their own plans to create an Islamic state spanning the whole region," says one intelligence officer.

Despite the jubilation in Islamabad, Mohammed's capture could have severe repercussions for Musharraf. The fact that Mohammed was found in a house owned by an army officer's brother raises serious questions about the involvement of military officers in helping members of Al Qaeda and the Taliban on the run from neighbouring Afghanistan.

Pakistan's military intelligence services played a key role in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan until September 11, 2001, when it agreed under great pressure to support the U.S. attack on the Islamic radicals across the border. But suspicions remain that elements of the military remain sympathetic to the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Arif Nizami, editor of the Daily Nation, says of Mohammed's arrest: "It shows how well-entrenched the extremists are in the Pakistani set-up. They have sanctuaries and friends in the highest of places like Rawalpindi."

The role of Jamaat-e-Islami is also likely to be questioned as the Qadoos family, who own the house where Mohammed was caught, are prominent members of the party, which has close links to the army and supports the cause of Kashmiri militants and the Taliban. "The arrest of Mohammed from the house of a Jamaat leader . . . is proof of Jamaat's links with Al Qaeda," asserted the secular Muttahida Qaumi Movement, which governs southern Pakistan's Sind province. Jamaat leaders, meanwhile, slammed the arrest and lauded Mohammed as "a hero of Islam."

Nevertheless, say senior government officials and Western diplomats, the capture of Mohammed has given Musharraf a respite from U.S. pressures-such as voting in the UN on a war with Iraq, which would not be popular in Muslim Pakistan. "The capture of Mohammed establishes Musharraf's credibility in the U.S. war against terrorism," says Nizami. "There may be questions asked, but they will be muted for the time being."

*James Hookway in Manila contributed to this article*

An accused terrorist's curriculum vitae

Ahmed Rashid/ Islamabad

On the surface, he wouldn't strike one as the type to become a top anti-Western Islamic terrorist leader. A fluent speaker of English, Arabic and two other languages, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was born in Kuwait in 1964 or 1965. He went to the United States as a young man and earned a degree from the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in 1986.

After moving to the Philippines in the early 1990s, the smooth talker enjoyed trawling for girls in Manila bars, according to Philippine investigators.

But terrorism seemed to run in the family and he is believed to have begun his deadly apprenticeship by helping his nephew, Ramzi Yousef. Mohammed is alleged to have provided financing for Yousef's 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York.

The two set up an Al Qaeda cell in Manila and drew up a plan to blow up 12 U.S.-bound airliners over the Pacific. The scheme was exposed in 1995 and Khalid is under indictment for his alleged role in the plot, which investigators believe was intended as a precursor to the attacks that actually took place in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. They also planned to assassinate the pope in 1995 in Manila, say the Philippine investigators, citing

testimony from an alleged accomplice. Yousef was later jailed in the U.S. for the WTC attack.

Mohammed is believed to have travelled widely in Southeast Asia during the 1990s, setting up terrorist groups and linking them to local Islamic parties. In 1996 he met Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and handed the Al Qaeda leader his network of contacts in Southeast Asia—a step that ensured Mohammed's instant elevation in the Al Qaeda hierarchy.

Within a few years Mohammed was running major Al Qaeda operations, and U.S. officials believe he had a major role to play in the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the attack on the U.S. warship Cole in Yemen in 2000. And Mohammed admitted last year, in an interview with an al-Jazeera TV station reporter that he was behind the September 11, 2001 attacks. Intelligence agencies believe that from a base in southern Afghanistan he coordinated the activities of the Hamburg cell that carried out the suicide attacks.

Hundreds of Al Qaeda members now in U.S. custody have said Mohammed was their link to the organization's hierarchy, say U.S. officials. They also claim that he gave the order last year to Al Qaeda operatives to go for soft targets and encouraged the Jemaah Islamiah group to go ahead with the October 12 Bali bombings.

Some Western news publications have also identified Mohammed as the killer of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl. The American was murdered in January 2002 while in Karachi to pursue a story on Islamic radicalism.