Negotiating Oblivion. Sayf al ‘Adl: Al Qaeda’s Top Operative

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Conscience is but a word that cowards use, Devised at first to keep the strong in awe. Our strong arms be our conscience; swords, our law.

*William Shakespeare — King Richard III*
Acknowledgements

What began as a thesis on Al Qaeda-Iranian relations, gave way to a year and a half project on Sayf al ‘Adl (literally translated as “Sword of Justice”). Hardly a day has passed that I have not given thought to ‘Adl’s whereabouts, the intricacies of his modus operandi, and the events that shaped his persona. Despite my dedication to researching one of Al Qaeda’s most secretive operatives, this thesis would not have been completed without the assistance of many people.

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**Introduction**

Although the Navy Seal raid on Usama bin Laden’s Abbotabad compound in May 2011 was largely hailed as the United States’ seminal victory in the War on Terror, the founder of Al Qaeda played a negligible operational role. Bin Laden assessed the geostrategic value of striking specific targets, but left operational planning to Al Qaeda Central’s military and security committees.\(^{15}\) As Bin Laden’s former bodyguard Nasser al Bahri put it, Al Qaeda operated by the adage “centralization of decision, decentralization of execution.”\(^{16}\) Since the organization’s founding in August 1988, a coterie of Egyptian operatives including Sayf al ‘Adl orchestrated or influenced just about every major attack against the United States and its allies. The former head of external operations formulated standard operating procedures in intelligence collection, counterintelligence, and target assessment – that are indispensible to the organization. The need for a systematic study of Sayf al ‘Adl, Al Qaeda’s most experienced operative, is great. As Richard Barrett, former head of MI6 Counterterrorism, put it to the author, ‘Adl “is operationally about the smartest senior leader that the organization has.”\(^{17}\) Furthermore, he represents “possibly the only chance that the central Al Qaeda leadership has to survive beyond (Ayman) al Zawahiri.”\(^{18}\)

This Thesis attempts to fill a pressing void in scholarship on Al Qaeda’s most accomplished operative, addressing Sayf al ‘Adl’s significance to the organization while narrating the jihadist’s murky but eventful life. ‘Adl’s significance to the organization has evolved over time. When he first joined Al Qaeda, ‘Adl served as a military trainer,

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\(^{15}\) Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Rohan Gunaratna. 18 Mar. 2014


\(^{17}\) Barrett, Richard. “Re: Interview” Message to Weisfuse, Ari. 2 Jan. 2014. E-mail.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
concerned with buttressing the organization’s operational capabilities by training scores of militants in explosives. In just a few years, he became the head of Al Qaeda’s security committee and Muhammad Atef’s deputy. As a senior leader, ‘Adl established Al Qaeda’s DAWA apparatus, a network of clerics instrumental in building a global organization capable of striking the United States at land, sea, and air.\textsuperscript{19} Since 9/11 and his house arrest in Tehran, ‘Adl’s operational importance to the organization diminished, but with an uncanny ability to adapt to changing circumstances, his influence on Al Qaeda’s strategic calculus did not. Through the World Wide Web, the Egyptian born operative transformed himself into a reputable military tactician. ‘Adl’s treatises on intelligence gathering, counterintelligence, and target identification published on jihadist forums improved Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities, serving as inspiration for militant groups in Syria.

The first chapter addresses Sayf al ‘Adl’s Egypt years as well as his role in the formation of Al Qaeda. There is a paucity of sources regarding ‘Adl’s youth, due to a series of intelligence failures on the part of the FBI and Egyptian intelligence, confusing the operative with another man entirely. Despite the lack of clarity, it is evident that the expertise he garnered as a commando in Egyptian Special Forces influenced his modus operandi for the foreseeable future and allowed him to quickly ascend Al Qaeda’s hierarchy.

The second chapter narrates Sayf al ‘Adl’s role in building Al Qaeda’s operational infrastructure from the ground up during the early 1990s to Operation Enduring Freedom (2001). Based on primary source documentation, ‘Adl was instrumental in Al Qaeda’s evolution from what his father-in-law Mustapha Hamid categorized as an “agricultural

\textsuperscript{19} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Aviv Oreg. 20 Mar. 2014
organization” to a global network.20 Despite ‘Adl’s senior leadership position, the Egyptian operative vehemently opposed the 9/11 hijackings, arguing that the operation would instigate an overwhelming American military response. Of course, ‘Adl’s worst fears came true, and Al Qaeda’s operational infrastructure was decimated.

The third chapter delineates ‘Adl’s role in a last ditch effort to defend Al Qaeda’s infrastructure from the Northern Alliance and U.S. Special Forces’ advance during the opening salvos of Operation Enduring Freedom up until his current house arrest in Tehran. Despite Abu Suleiman Ghaith’s testimony to the FBI, which was recently declassified, there is still a great deal of ambiguity regarding ‘Adl’s current whereabouts and relationship with the Pasdaran. Regardless, the monotony of life under house arrest influenced his decision to pen a series of essays on military tactics and Al Qaeda’s strategic doctrine going forward. Like his father-in-law, Sayf al ‘Adl viewed the War on Terror in post colonial terms, nothing short of an all out offensive against Islam.

In terms of sources, a wide array of primary source material was consulted. Jihadist forums including: Minbar al Tawhid, Muslim.org and the Global Islamic Media Front were perused for articles penned by ‘Adl or one of his associates. In addition, Mustapha Hamid’s blog provided a great deal of background material.21 To grasp ‘Adl’s historic significance to Al Qaeda, Fadil Harun’s memoir War against Islam as well as select documents from the Combating Terrorism Center’s (CTC) Harmony project were particularly useful. Lastly, the author conducted interviews with scholars and former

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http://www.mustafahamed.com

Oddly, ‘Adl’s online discussion with Mustapha Hamid, posted on the latter’s previous blog Mafa Asia, was not incorporated into the new one. Only Hamid’s response posts are accessible on the new blog. ‘Adl’s posts on Mafa Asia are accessible on select jihadists forums, because the former blog was taken down.
intelligence analysts alike to shed light on one of the most touted Al Qaeda operatives within intelligence and law enforcement.
Chapter I - The Egypt Years (1961-1989)

It should be acknowledged from the outset of this discussion that there is confusion regarding Sayf al ‘Adl’s nom de guerre. As a result, the task of distilling the basic timeline of his life let alone ‘Adl’s role in the formation of Al Qaeda is particularly arduous. Ali Soufan, a former FBI agent, stated in hindsight “we don’t really know Saif al-Adl’s real name, not even the Egyptian service knows who he is.”22 Soufan’s recognition is astonishing considering ‘Adl served as the “go-to-guy” at “almost every pivotal point in al-Qaeda’s history.”23 Although there is a great deal of ambiguity concerning ‘Adl’s background, this chapter will delineate ‘Adl’s Egypt years (1963-1989) up until the formation of Al Qaeda - a task that requires a systematic analysis of open source data. Before expounding further on ‘Adl’s upbringing, it is necessary to establish ‘Adl’s nom de guerre and delineate the controversy that ensued over it.

On September 23, 2001, President George W. Bush issued an executive order stipulating that any exchange between a U.S. citizen and individuals associated with Al Qaeda and the Taliban was prohibited.24 The Annex enumerated Sayf al ‘Adl as a “foreign person” posing a threat to U.S. citizens and national security. By October 10, with information from Egyptian Intelligence, the FBI listed Muhammad Ibrahim Makkawi as ‘Adl’s real name and placed a $5 million reward for actionable intelligence

24 EXECUTIVE ORDER 13224 - BLOCKING PROPERTY AND PROHIBITING TRANSACTIONS WITH PERSONS WHO COMMIT, THREATEN TO COMMIT, OR SUPPORT TERRORISM
on his whereabouts. Due to the Bureau’s close-working relationship with the Department of Justice, Department of Treasury, Her Majesty’s Treasury, National Counterterrorism Center, the UN Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee, numerous court documents and rewards for justice posters enumerated Makkawi as ‘Adl’s nom de guerre. A cursory review of Makkawi and ‘Adl’s backgrounds substantiate the claim. Both ‘Adl and Makkawi were colonels in the Egyptian Special Forces in the 1980s, and sometime during their military service joined Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) before opting to fight Soviet forces in Afghanistan. However, factual discrepancies emerged in the aftermath of President Bush’s Executive Order that brought into question the FBI’s assertion based off of Egyptian intelligence.

The FBI’s widely circulated most wanted list did not escape the attention of Ibrahim Makkawi, who was based in Islamabad with his five children and Pakistani wife. The former EIJ operative undertook a public relations campaign to clear his name. In 2005, he sent letters of protest to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and The White House. Makkawi proceeded to utilize Arab dailies spanning London to Cairo to plead his case over subsequent years. Through a third party’s email account, Makkawi issued a series of statements distancing himself from Al Qaeda and bemoaned his dire poverty due to his association with ‘Adl. Prior to the death of Usama Bin Laden in May 2011, Makkawi lamented in an email to the London-based Al Sharq Al Awsat, “I could not have begun to believe this persecution would cast a shadow for a period of ten

\[25\text{ See Appendix A}\]

As of January 2014, the FBI, the UN Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee, and HM Treasury list Makkawi as one of ‘Adl’s aliases. In contrast, the State Department and National Counter Terrorism Center omitted Makkawi from a list of aliases.

\[26\text{ http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?437034-}\]

Makkawi concluded in a subsequent email in July that he was the victim of an American orchestrated “extortion campaign.” The delirious Makkawi alleged that the U.S. “formed an alliance with the international (community) and Islamist movements,” effectively slandering him as an “international terrorist”.

While Makkawi’s public relations campaign received scant attention in the international media, successive articles written on the subject by Camille Tawil and Muhamad Al Shafey via print media and the blogosphere garnered considerable attention throughout the Arab world. In addition, the Bureau’s blunder engendered a great deal of chatter on Al Qaeda online forums including Muslim.org and Minbar al Tawhid. Forum members mocked the FBI’s ineptitude and the U.S. intelligence community’s inability to capture high-value targets. A member of the Muslim.org operating under the alias Al-Saif Al-Bariq (The Glimmering Sword), commented in May 2011:

Oh Azizi ‘Oh Makkawi,’ are you the one that lodged a complaint with America and its allies… my noble brother, Guantanamo (holds) captive everyone but only some tens of individuals are from Al Qaeda. And the remaining are mujahidin fighting in Afghanistan against the Crusader Alliance. Oh Azizi, “Oh Makkawi” many of the Arabs undertook campaigns upon themselves from who were in Pakistan and among them who did not enter Afghanistan and did not come to Pakistan except for the (after) world were imprisoned in Guantanamo then the Crusaders released them after laws regarding the oppression of prisoners. Are you oh Brother Makkawi who married the daughter of the martyr Aba Khanab al Masri or no?

Evidently, the Al Qaeda sympathizer was not convinced that Ibrahim Makkawi and Sayf al ‘Adl were two different people, but that made little difference. Regardless of ‘Adl’s true name, Washington D.C.’s inability to detain operatives of the same caliber as ‘Adl


30 Ibid.


32 http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?437034-
and unwillingness to sustain interrogation facilities in Guantanamo Bay buttressed jihadist morale. Interest in ‘Adl’s nom de guerre reached its apex in February 2012, when Egyptian security forces in concert with the FBI detained Ibrahim Makkawi at the Cairo International Airport. Initially, Egyptian authorities claimed to have detained Sayf al ‘Adl, the third highest-ranking member of Al Qaeda. However it quickly became apparent that the FBI had mistaken the true identity of Ibrahim Makkawi, due to factual discrepancies. In addition to the ten-year age difference between Makkawi and ‘Adl’s known birth dates, Makkawi’s ties to EIJ and Al Qaeda ceased years prior to 9/11. Allegedly, Makkawi had a falling out with Ayman al Zawahiri. They bickered over who was at fault for the failed EIJ assassination attempt of former Interior Minister Hassan al-Alfi (1993) and who should assume command of Vanguard of Conquest, an offshoot of EIJ operating from Somalia, who were put on trial in Egypt (1994). In contrast, as this discussion will elucidate further, ‘Adl was instrumental in Al Qaeda’s development well beyond the turn of the century. As Noman Benothman, a member of the Quilliam Foundation and a former jihadist, put it: the fundamental distinction between the two men is that “Makkawi hates al-Qaida, hates these jihadist groups, and in particular hates the Egyptian jihadists groups where Zawahiri came from.”


The inaccuracies that emerged during Makkawi’s detainment were not novel. A meticulous analysis of open source data demonstrates that ‘Adl and Makkawi are two different people, which U.S. authorities only ascertained by 2008.\textsuperscript{37} In 2004, the London based Islamic Observatory Center under the auspices of Yassir al Siri, a former member of EIJ and an acquaintance of ‘Adl and Makkawi, issued a “clarification” stating that ‘Adl and Makkawi were two different people all together. Al Siri alleged that the only “tie between them is that they were previously officers in the Egyptian army.”\textsuperscript{38} Other than that, they had little in common. Makkawi, who adopted the kunyah Abu al Munthur, married a Pakistani woman whereas ‘Adl married the daughter of Mustapha Hamid i.e. Abu Walid al Masri – jihadist royalty because of Hamid’s status as the first Arab Afghani. Mustapha Hamid, in email exchanges with Leah Farrow, a former terrorism analyst for the Australian police, corroborated Al Siri’s claim that ‘Adl and Makkawi were not the same person.\textsuperscript{39}

An Al Qaeda sympathizer known by the username Sheikh Abu Hamzal via Youtube provided visual confirmation. In June 2008, Sheikh Abu Hamzal posted an undated interview of Makkawi, narrated by Jonathan Pryce.\textsuperscript{40} A cursory analysis of the individual’s facial features reveals that ‘Adl cannot possibly be Makkawi, through a comparison of known photos.\textsuperscript{41} According to al Siri, ‘Adl’s real name is Muhamad Silah Al din Al Halim Zeidan, and is known within jihadist coteries by the kunyah Abu al

\textsuperscript{37} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Ronald Sandee. 31 Mar. 2014
\textsuperscript{38} Al Siri, Yasser. “Sayf al Adl is not Muhammad Makkawi.” Jihadology.net, 24, May 2011 http://jihadology.net/2011/05/24/the-islamic-media-observatory-releases-a-new-statement-sayf-al-adl-is-not-muhammad-Makkawi/#comments
\textsuperscript{41} See Appendix A
Madani.\textsuperscript{42} Department of Defense Guantanamo Bay detainee reports since 2008 corroborate al Siri and Hamid’s assertion, listing ‘Adl’s real name as Zeidan.\textsuperscript{43}

Considerably little is known about ‘Adl’s childhood or family. He was born in Shabin al Kum, a town along the Nile in the Minufiyah governorate. His eldest brother Hasan and sister, married to another jihadist Sharif al Masri, never left the agrarian town.\textsuperscript{44} There is a lack of consensus on the operative’s date of birth. According to the FBI and the National Counterterrorism Center, he was born on April 11, 1960 or 1963. Primary source documentation suggests that ‘Adl did not receive rigorous training in Islamic law during his upbringing.\textsuperscript{45}

Although, there is little indication of the seminal events that shaped his youth, some assumptions can be made from Mustapha Hamid and Ayman al Zawahiri’s memoirs. Like many inhabitants of the Upper Nile Delta, a resurgent Islamism served as ‘Adl’s religious pedigree not traditional education in Islamic jurisprudence. The humiliation of defeat in the June 1967 War had a profound effect on Jihadist collective memory and precipitated a return to an “imagined past”.\textsuperscript{46} Mustapha Hamid’s memoir \textit{Thurathura fauqa saqf al Alum} (Chatter over the World’s Rooftops) describes the shock of defeat in great detail. Hamid writes rather eloquently, “the fallout of defeat never ceased to stir up our lives and our thoughts as individuals and as a nation and persisted.

until the end of the conflict and the settlement of final accounts between Muslims and Jews,” i.e. the Camp David Accords. Furthermore, “The 1967 defeat took” the first Arab Afghan “to the shore of Islam,” and precipitated his radicalization. Hamid’s turn to an imagined, bygone era was largely indicative of the typical Egyptian Islamist experience and certainly permeated the provincial community ‘Adl spent his youth.

University campuses were particularly susceptible to a resurgent Islamism. In the Upper Nile Delta, Islamist student leaders went underground and formed covert cells, bent on overthrowing the Sadat regime. Student leaders including: Ayman al Zawahiri, Karam Zohdi, Nageh Ibrahim, Abu al-Ela Madi, Rifai Taha, Salah Hisham, and Mohamad Shawqi al Islamboli, whose brother would assassinate President Sadat, were particularly active. The nascent student movement morphed into EIJ and al Jamiet al Islamiyya.

Select Islamists including Abbud al-Zomar and Issam al Qamri entered the Egyptian intelligence community and armed forces to gain the expertise and arms necessary “to undertake a military coup in Egypt” and invert what they saw as a “corrupt government.” In 1975, EIJ launched an ill-conceived coup attempt by acquiring munitions from the Technical Military College with the aim of eliminating the President and other members of government. But as Ayman al Zawahiri attested to, “good

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48 Ibid.
planning and preparations” were largely absent. The movement fully recognized that it
had to “rid itself of the haphazardness and rashness” that characterized much of its
actions. As a result, it began recruiting heavily within the armed forces. Al Qamri
should be regarded as a precursor to the coterie of Egyptians: Muhamad Atef, Abu
Ubaida al Banshiri, and Sayf al ‘Adl who would transform Al Qaeda’s military wing into
a formidable force, capable of striking multiple targets simultaneously.

An Islamist underground was well established, by the time ‘Adl studied business
at Shabin el Kum University during the late 1970s. The provincial-raised operative
arrived on campus with a muscular physique, despite his diminutive stature, and an
uncanny gift for soccer. Although, considerably little is known about ‘Adl’s university
days and his sociopolitical affinities at the time, he was invariably exposed to an Islamist
undercurrent. As Ayman al Zawahiri acknowledges in Fursan tahta rayah al nabi
(Knights under the Banner of the Prophet), at the time, “there were religious groups” on
university campuses “that tried to propagate the true teaching of Islam and its pure
principles,” a euphemism for fundamentalism. Furthermore, “Muslim preachers”
appealed to “droves of university students” like ‘Adl.

After graduating Shabin el Kum University with a degree in business, ‘Adl joined
Special Force 777, taking part in covert operations in Libya and Sudan. US Delta Force

52 Zawāhirī, Ayman, and Laura Mansfield. His Own Words. A Translation and Analysis of the Writings of
53 Ibid.
54 Fahmy, Mohamed F. "Egyptian Comrades Remember Reported Leader of Al Qaeda." CNN. N.p., 20
55 Zayyāt, Muntaṣir, and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’. The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Lāden's Right-
56 Ibid.
57 FBIS GMP20030508000135
and German GSG 9 trained the unit in the 1980s, which may have included ‘Adl. In the spring of 1981, according to a dossier of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (GIS), ‘Adl made contact with Issam al Qamri and in extension, the EIJ network. Select secondary sources suggest ‘Adl assisted orchestrating Anwar Sadat’s Assassination on October 6, 1981, even served as the mastermind of the EIJ operation. However it is likely that ‘Adl was too young at the time. According to Mohamad Abd al Rahman, son of Omar Abd al Rahman the blind Sheikh, ‘Adl came “from another generation” and as a university student at the time, “was too young,” to play a prominent role in the assassination.

Hasan Zeidan denied that his brother Muhammad ever followed any Sheikhs, maintaining in an emotional interview with Al Masri al Yawm (Egypt Today) that his brother was a normal student, who got along fine with Christians and eschewed radical Islam. Hasan went as far as to say that “if there were angels in human form he (Muhammad) would be one of them.” But by ‘Adl’s own account, he was “guided by God to understand the right Islam” i.e. radicalized “in the early 1980s.” According to

58 FBIS EUP20020218000278
Professor El-Tobgui was kind enough to help translate the dialogue from Egyptian dialect.
62 Ibid.
63 Al-Qa’ida Commander Writes Al-Zarqawi ‘Jihadist Biography’ Translated by Bryn Mwar http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu:8080/dspace/handle/10066/5092?show=full
Jihadists sources, ‘Adl spent a great deal of time at the Fajr al Islam mosque in Shabin el Kum, where he likely radicalized under the tutelage of Sheikh Abdul Fatah Tawfiq.\(^64\)

Regardless, in the mid 1980s the Egyptian operative cultivated the operational expertise that would allow him in conjunction with Abu Ubaida al Masri and Muhamad Atef to build a global terror network. He garnered expertise in explosives, counterintelligence and parachuting, earning the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.\(^65\) His career in Special Forces imbued discipline as well as the importance of training in effective communication, and intelligence gathering on enemy forces.\(^66\) But more importantly, ‘Adl internalized “general principles of security,” that would shape his strategic calculus for the remainder of his life, even after joining Al Qaeda.\(^67\)

Training in counterintelligence imbued the importance of taking select precautions to ensure operational security. He learned the importance of allocating information to junior operatives on a need to know basis, to prevent a large “volume of information” from falling into the adversary’s hands.\(^68\) In addition, ‘Adl trained in counter-surveillance deception tactics and learned how to utilize “false questions” that would convey vital information to fellow operatives without divulging names or the


\(^66\) Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Bruce Hoffman. 27 Nov. 2013.

\(^67\) http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=nkpabwye

locations of comrades to any foreign intelligence agencies monitoring the call.\(^6^9\) ‘Adl provides the following example in his treatise on Security and Communications.

Caller: Is this Abu Hanifa?
Responder: No oh brother. Abu Hanifa is not here.
Caller: When is he coming? Is he visiting?\(^7^0\)

It is unclear what or who the popular kunyah “Abu Hanifa” refers to, but undoubtedly the use of a generic laqib (nickname) referencing an eighth century Islamic jurist would confound most intelligence analysts listening in on the conversation. In short during his stint in the Egyptian Special Forces, ‘Adl learned many of the counterintelligence techniques that he would incorporate into his training curriculums for novice and advanced Al Qaeda operatives.

At some point in ‘Adl’s military service, he involved himself with Al Najun al Nar (Survivors of Fire), an offshoot of EIJ comprised of army officers bent on avenging the Mubarak regime’s harsh crackdown on Islamists in the aftermath of the Sadat assassination.\(^7^1\) The Egyptian operative primarily provided training in intelligence gathering and detonation techniques, necessary to strike targets and mitigate the countermeasures taken by the Egyptian intelligence apparatus.\(^7^2\) Although his involvement in EIJ would be short lived, he indelibly left his mark on the Jihadist imagination and began what would become a life long obsession with the aviation industry. He formulated a novel operational concept that Khaled Sheikh Muhammad subsequently coopted a decade later. ‘Adl raised the notion of hijacking of a commercial airplane and ramming it into the Egyptian Parliament in concert with simultaneous truck

\(^7^0\) Ibid.
\(^7^2\) Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Bruce Hoffman. 27 Nov. 2013.
bombings. An anonymous Egyptian lawmaker with knowledge of the makeshift plot, would later label ‘Adl “the true father of” 9/11.\textsuperscript{73} Regardless of the categorization’s accuracy, it is evident that even before obtaining his first exposure to combat against communist forces, ‘Adl displayed an uncanny ruthlessness that would make him one of the most widely feared operatives within the intelligence community.

In May 1987, \textit{Al Najun al Nar} attempted the assassination of several government officials responsible for rounding up and torturing scores of Islamists in October 1981. Interior Ministers Hasan Abu Basha and Ismail Nabwi were targeted and sprayed with bullets.\textsuperscript{74} In conjunction, soft targets including: three U.S. diplomats based out of Cairo and Makram Ahmed, an editor for Al Mussawar, were shot at.\textsuperscript{75} Although the assassination attempts succeeded in injuring their targets, none succumbed to their injuries. Fearful of clandestine Islamist cells within the Egyptian Armed Forces, the regime responded swiftly and detained upwards of 6,000 militants, 400 of whom for an indefinite period of time - what would be known as \textit{al qadiyah al rqm} 401 (issue number 401).\textsuperscript{76} Sayf al ‘Adl and Thirwat Shehata, who would become Zawahiri’s deputy, were among the detainees.\textsuperscript{77} However due to a lack of evidence, ‘Adl was released from prison and was only demoted from the rank of colonel.\textsuperscript{78}

Given ‘Adl’s Special Forces background and the standard operating procedures imbued through commando training, disagreements with other members of EIJ over

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} FBIS GMP20030508000135
military tactics arose. He was unimpressed by the movement’s military training, allocation of resources, and lack of long-term strategic vision. In ‘Adl’s mind, the movement lacked the “practical experience” namely, the military expertise to overthrow the Mubarak regime. In short, the EIJ lost sight of the “time-tested military principle” of striking the enemy at a finite location, which would have forced the Sadat regime’s hand in dispersing its forces, undermining their efficacy. However, due to the movement’s lack of strategic acumen, Egyptian security forces quickly took control of the situation, obliterating Islamist infrastructure that had taken years of meticulous planning.

‘Adl was forced to set his sights on “an open arena of Jihad” i.e. Afghanistan. His decision to leave Egypt for Afghanistan after he was released from prison was in part due to EIJ’s lack of freedom of movement and ability to conduct operations. ‘Adl gave five reasons for the decision in his posthumous biography of Abu Musab al Zarqawi.

1. The Egyptian Security Services were preemptively debilitating the operational capacities of Islamist groups.
2. Regime informants permeated the Islamist political landscape and inhibited effective operational planning.
3. The EIJ’s lack of financial resources debilitated the organization’s operational capacities.
4. Secure communication among operatives and cells was impossible, given the regime’s stranglehold on the embattled movement.
5. Honest Egyptians could not bear to watch the suffering of their homeland and preferred to flee.

Similar to Ayman al Zawahiri, ‘Adl recognized that a jihadist movement required its own territory, unencumbered by the Egyptian intelligence apparatus. As Zawahiri freely

79 Al-Qa’ida Commander Writes Al-Zarqawi ‘Jihadist Biography’ Translated by Bryn Mwar
http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu:8080/dspace/handle/10066/5092?show=full
For the Arabic version:
http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=ttofom6f
81 Al-Qa’ida Commander Writes Al-Zarqawi ‘Jihadist Biography’ Translated by Bryn Mwar
http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu:8080/dspace/handle/10066/5092?show=full
82 Ibid.
acknowledged, “the movement (was) in need of a land that (could) better serve as the soil, where its seeds (could) grow and gain experience in fighting, politics and the organization of skills.”\textsuperscript{83} In short, uninhibited access to territory was necessary to establish training camps, disseminate operational expertise, and recruit skilled operatives.

For the most part, Arab Afghans played a negligible role in hostilities against the USSR, with the exception of the Battle of Jaji (1987), which brought a coterie of Egyptians to the forefront of the struggle. Essam Deraz, a former Egyptian intelligence officer and Bin Laden’s first biographer recounted that during the engagement, “a group of Arabs led by Abu ‘Ubayda and Abu Haffs spotted the Russian commandos land on a mountain opposite the Arabs’ position.”\textsuperscript{84} In response, they laid a trap for the Soviet commandos, and with ease enveloped enemy forces.\textsuperscript{85} The victory became firmly etched in jihadist collective memory. According to jihadist lore, after killing a Russian commando Atef notified Usama bin Laden via radio transmission that he had a “communist at his feet.”\textsuperscript{86} In short, the engagement boosted Arab Afghan morale and served as a precursor to the establishment of Al Qaeda al Askarî (Al Qaeda’s military wing).

By September 1988, the Kremlin largely recognized its military incursion into Afghanistan was untenable and signed the Geneva Accords, requiring a complete withdrawal.\textsuperscript{87} In the midst of the euphoria of victory, Al Qaeda was established in Bayt al

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
Ansar, Bin Laden’s guesthouse in Peshawar, Pakistan. The son of a Yemeni construction billionaire realized that a database of missing Arab Afghans who had volunteered for charities in Peshawar was necessary.\(^88\) When \textit{Al Qaeda al Askari} was initially founded its stated aim was to “prepare freedom fighting young men,” by cultivating “combat skills, military technical skills and composing programs and procedures for a disciplined military” through a network of training camps, particularly Sa’da.\(^89\) The ambitious project required a plethora of professional warriors, with military backgrounds.

According to intelligence officials in charge of tracking senior Al Qaeda operatives in the 1990s and the 2000s, before travelling to Afghanistan via Saudi Arabia, ‘Adl served as an instructor at the Sa’da camp in Lebanon from 1988-1989.\(^90\) The Lebanese affiliate of the infamous Afghani camp imbued operational expertise in its trainees, preparing them for the rigors of combat in Afghanistan.

The Sa’da camp in Afghanistan, established by Abdullah Azzam in 1984, served as the \textit{Maktab al-Khidmat}’s first training camp.\(^91\) Originally the camp was located in Paktia, the Haqqani heartland, along the Afghan-Pakistan border to train marginalized Arab-Afghans in religion and the usage of light arms.\(^92\) The aim of the training camp was

\(^89\) AFGP-2002-000078
\(^{19}\) Hamid, Mustapha. Salib fi summah Qandahar. 19
to take Arab recruits with different backgrounds and integrate them into a unified fighting force.\footnote{Ibid.}

After briefly serving as a trainer at the Sa’da affiliate in Lebanon, Sayf al ‘Adl returned to Shabin el Kum with the intention of leaving for Saudi Arabia where flights to Afghanistan were subsidized by the Monarchy. Under the impression that his brother was leaving for Saudi Arabia to find work, Hasan Zeidan drove Muhammad to the airport.\footnote{Zalat, Ali. “‘Al Masri Al Yawm’ fi munzil zaim ‘al Qaeda’ al mawqif bi ‘Shabin el Kum’: usrathu tusiru ala wafathu wa tanfi salathu bi al tanzim” Al Masri Al Yawm 5/23/2011 http://today.almasryalyoum.com/printfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=297777 <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/164179>}

Little did Hassan know that he would not see or hear from his brother for the next twenty-five some odd years. A year after arriving in Saudi Arabia, Hassan was informed by an associate of Muhammad’s that his younger brother had died between Mecca and Medina after preforming the \textit{umrah}, a minor pilgrimage to Mecca.\footnote{Zalat, Ali. “Sayf al ‘Adl ‘al haqiqi’: shaqiqhu yutabaruhu mtawfi wa adilhu ‘muatiqal fi Iran’” Al Masri al Yawm 2/29/2012 http://today.almasryalyoum.com/printfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=297777} According to jihadist accounts, during the \textit{umrah} Muhammad met Bin Laden and joined Al Qaeda.\footnote{Ibid.} Assuming Hassan was honest to \textit{Al Yawm al Masri}, Muhammad Zeidan likely faked his own death to serve as a military trainer for the nascent organization under the war name: Sayf al ‘Adl. Mustapha Hamid’s short biography of Abir Sabil, one of Sayf al ‘Adl’s many aliases, corroborates assertions that ‘Adl joined Al Qaeda in 1989.\footnote{Zalat, Ali. “‘Al Masri Al Yawm’ fi munzil zaim ‘al Qaeda’ al mawqif bi ‘Shabin el Kum’: usrathu tusiru ala wafathu wa tanfi salathu bi al tanzim” Al Masri Al Yawm 5/23/2011 http://today.almasryalyoum.com/printfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=297777} 

Although Sayf al ‘Adl was not a founding member of Al Qaeda, he proved to be an invaluable recruit.\footnote{Ibid.} Other than Muhamad Atef, who had served in a highly selective
Egyptian police unit, no one within the movement possessed the same professionalism, and operational expertise. Due to ‘Adl’s unique skills, the former commando quickly ascended the Arab Afghan hierarchy.

By the time ‘Adl arrived in Afghanistan in 1989, the Mujahidin campaign against the USSR had almost ceased entirely. However, the former commando continued to play an instrumental role in buttressing the nascent movement’s operational capabilities. ‘Adl served as a trainer at an Al Qaeda training camp in Asadabad, within the Kunar region. As Mutapha Hamid pointed out, the camp not only disseminated operational expertise through grueling military drills but served as a logistics center vis a vis the “guest house in Peshawar” i.e. Bayt al Ansar. According to Sayf al ‘Adl’s account, “youths came from Peshawar to the camp for crash training course” for no more than three days to learn “how to use the Kalashnikov” before leaving for the battlefront. However, the former commando viewed the training as lackluster, insufficient to prepare youths for the rigors of combat. ‘Adl suggested that the camp institute a twenty-one day curriculum for basic training. In his eyes, insufficient battlefield preparation was tantamount to “someone who does not complete his ablutions for prayer,” required under Islamic law. The newly instituted curriculum attracted numerous recruits until Abu Umran, head of the Jamil al Rahman Arabs, ordered the inhabitants of the camp to leave immediately for the frontline in Jalalabad. At that point he “could not bear to remain in the camp” and was asked at the

99 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Bruce Hoffman. 27 Nov. 2013.
100 Al Siri, Yasser. “Sayf al Adl is not Muhammad Makkawi.” Jihadology.net, 24, May 2011
http://jihadology.net/2011/05/24/the-islamic-media-observatory-releases-a-new-statement-sayf-al-adl-is-not-muhammad-makkawi/#comments
101 FBIS GMP20040402000070
102 Ibid.
behest of his colleagues to leave for the front and train militants in tactics as well as the usage of stinger missiles.\textsuperscript{103}

The Battle of Jalalabad marked the first confrontation with communist forces after the Soviet Union extricated itself from Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{104} The campaign began in March 1988 and only ended days before the fall of Kabul in April 1992.\textsuperscript{105} Competing elements of the resistance foresaw that the Communist government in Kabul would quickly crumble. Due to Jalalabad’s close proximity to Pakistan, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the CIA had the city in its crosshairs. In Mustapha Hamid’s \textit{Salib fi summah Qandahar} (Cross in the sky of Qandahar), one of twelve books on the history of Arab Afghans, the respected military strategist provided an elaborate chart illustrating the chain of command.\textsuperscript{106} According to Hamid, the CIA in conjunction with its counterparts in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt maintained operational control over the relevant factions: Maktab al Khidmat, Jamaat e Islami, Itihad al Islami, and the Haqqani network.

However the battle planning that commenced had a divisive effect among different elements of the \textit{mujahidin}, particularly due to the involvement of external powers. Mustapha Hamid recounts that there is “no doubt, the Jalalabad campaign (was) the most controversial battle in the history of the Afghan war.”\textsuperscript{107} Furthermore, “the problem (lied) in conflicting approaches of one, adopting a quick decisive war that (would) ensure victory.”\textsuperscript{108} ‘Adl was equally harsh in his assessment, calling the battle a

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Hamid, Mustapha. \textit{Salib fi summa Qandhar}. 27
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. 24
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
“disaster,” defying his expectations. Some mujahidin leaders maintained that due to the lack of adequate munitions specifically stinger missiles and SAM 7, an attrition strategy should have been adopted faced with overwhelming communist air power.

Usama bin Laden lobbied Jalaludin Haqqani for Al Qaeda operatives to obtain combat experience. Although his top deputies Muhammad Atef and Abu Ubayda were initially skeptical, the skepticism gave way to “conviction and enthusiasm.” During the initial stages of the engagement, Bin Laden maintained that his forces in concert with the Haqqani network: conquered far-reaching swaths of territory, demonstrated uncanny heroism, and above all, casualties were “proportional” to the sheer size of the engagement. However the Saudi’s insistence that his men were battle ready proved folly, eighty Arab Afghans was killed in action and more than one hundred sustained injuries. Muhammad Atef suffered a significant injury and required urgent medical care. In addition, mujahidin forces failed to capture Jalalabad, which further eroded unity within the ranks and any semblance of law and order within the country.

Little is known about the ‘Adl’s specific operational role in the engagement. By all accounts, ‘Adl took part in the battle under the auspices of Bin Laden’s Arab group, and did not assume a leadership position in conjunction with Atef and Banshiri. In April 1989, ‘Adl took part in an Arab column’s sweep from Torkhom, adjacent to the Pakistani border, to the Samar Khayl Mountain. There, ‘Adl met Ibrahim Makkawi. ‘Adl

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109 FBIS GMP20040402000070
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
113 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Vahid Brown. 18 Feb. 2014

www.muslim.org/vb/showthread.php?413574-4
admired Makkawi for the latter’s adroit analysis in *Manba al Jihad*, the Haqqani network Arabic language magazine, on past military engagements.\(^{114}\)

As a trainer at the Jihad Wal training camp, Sayf al ‘Adl made his greatest contribution to date. In contrast to Khalden and al Faruq, Jihad Wal enjoyed a unique position in the nascent organization because it specialized in training commanders rather than ordinary recruits. ‘Adl implored Bin Laden to establish an informational jihadist archive.\(^{115}\) He reminded Abu Abdullah that the camp had been established two years and ten months earlier. The period “was copious with events, travels, lessons, and experiences” that needed to be recorded and archived for future reference.\(^{116}\) In an act of humility, ‘Adl acknowledged “(his own) ignorance” regarding the appropriate method of getting the trainees to work effectively with “outside parties,” thereby demonstrating the need for such an archive.\(^{117}\)

Given Sayf al ‘Adl’s military background, he considered establishing a coherent standard operating procedure as paramount. He subsequently became Al Qaeda’s head archivist and taught operatives how to catalog internal memos appropriately like a state sponsored intelligence unit to ensure operational security. ‘Adl taught a seven step process in writing up reports.\(^{118}\)

1. Establish the appropriate classification of the report: “normal…secret…very secret…top secret” and write it in red letters on the top

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\(^{114}\) FBIS GMP2004040200070  
< http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10547&article=441216#.U1RmxZRE7c>  
\(^{116}\) Ibid.  
\(^{117}\) Ibid.  
\(^{118}\) Adl, Sayf. Security and Intelligence. (May 2011)  
2. List the names of those permitted to view the intelligence estimate “under the word recipient”
3. Date the document
4. Label the memo as “normal...urgent”
5. Number the letter
6. Enumerate the report
7. Write the subject

Sayf al ‘Adl’s emphasis on establishing a standard operating procedure became a salient feature of his role in Al Qaeda for the next two decades. He wrote up lengthy bulletins on operation compartmentalization and secure communication among other things, effectively building a counterintelligence apparatus that would prevent foreign intelligence agencies from ascertaining the organization’s plans. In effect, the modus operandi Sayf al ‘Adl instilled in recruits allowed Al Qaeda to carry out stunning attacks on the U.S. homeland.

119 See Appendix B for a visual representation.
Chapter II – On the edge of Abyss: The road to 9/11 (1990-2001)

The second chapter weaves together a plethora of open source material to elucidate Sayf al ‘Adl’s operational importance to Al Qaeda from its founding until Operation Enduring Freedom. At his core, ‘Adl is a military man who adheres to a rigid standard operating procedure imbued through his military service. In contrast to Usama bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad who were far more concerned with Al Qaeda’s brand name appeal even at the expense of Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities, ‘Adl viewed maintaining and buttressing the network’s military capabilities as paramount.120 As a result, ‘Adl as this discussion will address further disagreed with the planes operation (2001) because it would instigate a full-fledged American invasion of Afghanistan, obliterating Al Qaeda’s operational infrastructure that had taken years to develop. Due to ‘Adl’s staunch disagreement with Bin Laden and the influence of his father-in-law Mustapha Hamid, the former commando developed a strategic doctrine of his own: “qualitative,” low risk operations targeting American economic interests.

The balding five feet five inches Egyptian with “scarring under his right eye” emerged virtually unscathed from a decade and a half of combat.121 “He wore glasses with heavy black frames and large square lenses and had a baby face that gave him a youthful appearance.”122 By his own account, after the USSR extricated itself from Afghanistan “disagreements began to emerge among factions of the Afghan

mujahideen.”\textsuperscript{123} As a result scores of Afghan Arabs “were thinking of returning to their native countries, including the Saudis, Yemenis, and Jordanians who had no problems with the security services in their homeland,” echoing his reasons for leaving Egypt in the first place.\textsuperscript{124} In contrast, Egyptian operatives were compelled to stay in Afghanistan due to their persona non grata status in their homeland or leave for countries with feckless central governments including Somalia, Yemen, and Bosnia.\textsuperscript{125} Regardless, ‘Adl stayed in Peshawar from 1990-1992, ensconced in a bloody civil war in Afghanistan until he left for Khartoum at the request of senior Al Qaeda leadership.

‘Adl was instrumental in buttressing Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities as an explosives expert at the Khallad camp along the Afghani-Pakistani border in August 1990. Mustapha Hamid provides a startling account of his first impression of ‘Adl. Allegedly, Hamid’s convoy headed toward the camp and just as the truck was entering the camp’s perimeter a litany of explosives detonated all around it. Presuming it was an ambush orchestrated by enemy forces, Hamid and his companions took defensive positions, scurrying toward the base of the truck. It soon became apparent that the detonations were merely coordinated for an ongoing training exercise when ‘Adl emerged out of the fog of smoke laughing at the chaos.\textsuperscript{126} The Egyptian born operative “gloated over our Afghan brothers who came out from under the vehicle with their clothes covered in mud and wet.”\textsuperscript{127} Hamid remarked in his personal diary after the initial

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} FBIS GMP20040402000070
meeting that the Egyptian operative appeared “thin, strong and full of energy” and possessed “narrow Asian eyes that showed intelligence and cunning.”

‘Adl’s abrasive persona and self-confidence bordering on hubris likely appealed to Hamid. Within a year and half, Hamid offered ‘Adl his fifteen-year old daughter Asma’s hand in marriage.

In 1991, ‘Adl married Asma, one of seven children raised by Hamid and his first wife Wafa. ‘Adl, who hailed from a provincial community in the upper Nile Delta, married into Jihadist royalty. Hamid was legendary in jihadist coteries for leaving his job as a mechanic for Mercedes Benz in Kuwait to fight the IDF in Southern Lebanon during Operation Litania (1978) before leaving for Afghanistan as a self-fashioned journalist and military strategist. Although he “dreamt of Jihad spreading from Afghanistan to the rest of the Islamic and Arab countries,” Hamid refused to feign interest in Islamic jurisprudence or theology, and kept abreast with the New York Times and the BBC World Service. His breadth of knowledge on military thought from the Sun Tzu’s Art of War to Maoism earned him fame as a confidant for Jalaludin Haqqani. But his divisive personality garnered the ire of Bin Laden when Hamid suggested that the Saudi be sentenced to death for strategic miscalculations during the battle of Jalalabad. It is likely that mutual interest in military thought and antagonism strengthened the relationship, which clearly got off on the wrong foot.

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128 Ibid.
130 Ibid. 261
131 Ibid.

Shortly after, Asma gave birth to twins: a baby boy and a girl named Asia. But tragedy struck and the boy died in infancy.\textsuperscript{133} Undeterred, the couple conceived another boy who would be named Khalid, after Asma’s brother who had died in 1990 when a communist aircraft bombed the Al Faruq camp where he had been training. Despite the trauma of losing a child and a bout with typhus, from 1990-1992, ‘Adl remained operationally active in Afghani sectarian conflicts and remained an invaluable commando trainer whose expertise was unquestioned.

From 1990-1992, ‘Adl travelled back and forth between Peshwar and Khost to serve as an explosives trainer at the Jihad Wal camp.\textsuperscript{134} Training typically consisted of a forty-five day course known as “security offensive,” which covered everything from target practice using Kalashnikovs to special operations including: techniques in “assassination” and “kidnapping” targets.\textsuperscript{135} In addition, seminars in “surveillance, identifying targets, and information gathering” – ‘Adl’s MO were taught to trainees. According to Nasser al-Bahri, one of Bin Laden’s many body guards, better known by the kunyah Abu Jandal, ‘Adl served his role with characteristic ruthlessness.\textsuperscript{136} The Egyptian operative forced trainees to devote “whole days studying (their) targets’ routine: when they ate, where the mosque and canteen were located, how many people were left on guard during prayers and meals, how they organized their rotas.”\textsuperscript{137} In short, by the early 1990s ‘Adl formulated an extensive curriculum in intelligence gathering and

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
counter intelligence that would imbue operational expertise that would allow Al Qaeda to conduct simultaneous attacks across the globe.

The local enemy model adopted by EIJ and El Jamiet Islamiyah proved increasingly ineffective, affirming many of the lessons ‘Adl gleaned from Al Qadiyah Rqm 401. Although the movement’s network structure in the early 1990s was increasingly decentralized, permeating large segments of Egyptian society and an array of “open arenas” of jihad abroad, monumental blunders were made. In his article on Security and Communications, published in Mu’askar al Batar, ‘Adl referenced lapses in operational security in a failed assassination attempt of Egyptian Prime Minister Aref Siddiqi in November 1993. According to his account, the Mubarak regime alleged that operatives from Peshawar orchestrated the attack but had little proof to buttress the accusation. Until Egyptian intelligence monitored a telephone call made from Pakistan to Egypt three days after the operation, setting up “an appointment to meet in Cairo.” Egyptian security forces swiftly ambushed the “appointment” and rounded up operatives involved in orchestrating the attack, debilitating the movement’s operational capabilities. Although, ‘Adl had left for Sudan in the Spring of 1993, and did not personally witness the failure, the incident was indicative of the former commando’s disenchantment with regional revolutionary movements. As a result, his determination to bring the fight to the far enemy like other Egyptian operatives including his father-in-law was resolute.

138 Al-Qa’ida Commander Writes Al-Zarqawi ‘Jihadist Biography’ Translated by Bryn Mwar http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu:8080/dspace/handle/10066/5092?show=full
Mustapha Hamid is reported to be the intellectual forefather of Al Qaeda’s focus on targeting America. According to a communiqué posted on Hamid’s blog *Mafa Asia* under the pseudonym Abir Sabil in January 2011, ‘Adl asked his father-in-law rhetorically:

> Was it not the strategy of al-Qa’ida, which you participated in developing to work to weaken the present world order and thus weaken the underlying political establishment so that out people in Arab and Muslim countries could seize the opportunity and free themselves from the idols weighing on their chests, both rulers and agents?"^{141}

As ‘Adl alluded to, Al Qaeda Central adapted Hamid’s strategy of undermining the lone superpower’s geopolitical interests as a means of bringing down the international system within which local regimes operated. Regardless of Hamid’s later interest in distancing himself from Al Qaeda Central after the Planes Operation, the self-styled journalist shaped the organization’s bent on targeting the United States, despite personal animosity between him and Bin Laden. Hamid, as ‘Adl would do in his own treatises, drew inspiration from the Battle of Badr (624), an infamous military engagement between the early adherents of Islam and the polytheist Quraysh. He recounted to his son-in-law that “the greatest raid in the history of Islam” was contingent on “faith and economy.”^{142}

> Furthermore, it “was aimed at the adversary’s economy and financial arteries: at capturing them on behalf of the Muslims and denying them to the infidels.”^{143} The notion of targeting U.S. economic interests, would become the cornerstone of ‘Adl’s own strategy: “qualitative,” low-risk operations and will be discussed in greater detail.

By April 1992 *mujahidin* forces conquered Kabul from the Communists, but the euphoria of victory quickly gave way to ethnic conflict. A full-fledged civil war erupted

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142 AFGP-2002-600053
143 Ibid.
in the streets of Kabul after Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former communist who embraced the fundamentalist Haqqani network, refused to accept the position of Prime Minister at the behest of President Burhanuddin Rabbani. Hekmatyar outright rejected the offer and responded with a relentless bombing campaign on Kabul in the hopes of bringing Tajik and Uzbeki forces, under the command of Ahmad Shah Masud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, to its knees. In short, Kabul engulfed into “Beirut-style” street to street engagements, rendering it particularly dangerous for Arab Afghans to operate.

It is evident from a series of letters exchanged between Hamid and ‘Adl the following year that the former commando found the sectarian in-fighting disconcerting and even questioned the morality of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhan Rabbani – foreshadowing his subsequent mistrust of the strongmen that controlled Somalia. Given his military training, ‘Adl tended to view military action in strictly Clausewitzian terms namely: as an extension of politics. Whereas he saw EIJ, *el Jamiet Islamiyah* and Al Qaeda as revolutionary, anti imperialist movements with well-articulated political aims, the Afghani factions lacked long term strategic vision. Hamid, with a well-documented history of eschewing ideological considerations out of realpolitik, was quick to remind his son-in-law “God strengthens his religion through the iniquitous man and people who have no morals.” Furthermore, Hamid cajoled ‘Adl to keep idealism at an arm’s length, because any fledgling movement must optimize a series of inadequate alternatives to build a political base spanning intricate ethnic divisions.

146 AFGP-2002-600053
147 Ibid.
Evidently, Hamid’s prodding convinced the former commando to use the conflict as a means to promote Al Qaeda’s interests, which became increasingly anti-Tajik after the death of Abdullah Azzam and pro-Pashtun. During Ramadan (November) 1992, ‘Adl delegated his personal secretary Fazul Abdullah Mohammad better known by the kunyah: Fadil Harun, a native of the Comoros Islands, the task of evaluating Hizbi Islami based in Jalalabad under the auspices of Yunis Khalis. As will be increasingly evident in this discussion, Harun rose to prominence within Al Qaeda and proved to be a formidable operative in his own right until Somali forces killed him in June 2011. In conjunction with Hizbi Islami operatives, Harun conducted reconnaissance on the Surobi district of Kabul specifically: targets for detonation, position of enemy forces, and primary source of electricity - an adjacent lake. The joint reconnaissance operation marked the first time Arab Afghans had traversed that far north in Afghanistan. ‘Adl’s decision would pay off handsomely four years later when Bin Laden was offered asylum by the Taliban at the behest of Khalis. In doing so, the former commando demonstrated an uncanny ability to navigate the sectarian divide, a character trait that would serve him well and ensure his continued survival when he would be on the run in the aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom.

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Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nelly Lahoud. 12 Mar. 2014
Sometime before leaving for East Africa, ‘Adl accompanied his immediate superior “Chinese brother,” the kunya of an unknown senior operative, to oversee the frontlines manned by Hizbi Islami militants in Jalalabad, who were likely fighting government forces at the time.\(^{152}\) In passing the Amir of the Jalalabad fortification, ‘Adl was briefed regarding rifts that had developed between Arab leaders and their Afghani counterparts, incensing the former Egyptian commando.\(^{153}\) According to Harun, Sayf al ‘Adl demonstrated “seasoned diplomacy,” despite tactical disagreements regarding the inefficacy of old techniques, which often led to incidents of friendly fire.\(^{154}\)

By the beginning of 1993, the Horn of Africa was squarely fixed in Al Qaeda’s cross hairs. On January 20, ‘Adl took part in a meeting in Atef’s home to examine the possibility of opening training camps in the Ogeden region of Ethiopia along with seven operatives including: Sayf al Islam al Masri and Abu Khaled al Masri.\(^{155}\) Sayf al Islam was tasked with leading the operation, because ‘Adl was instructed to stay in Pakistan.\(^{156}\) The orders were: 1) Ensure the designated operatives remained isolated, so that they could take necessary measures to maintain operational security. 2) Undergo training in “travel procedures” and “reconnaissance strategy” under Mustapha Hamid.\(^{157}\) Sayf al Islam and the operatives under his command left for Africa in February of that year.

Months later during the spring, ‘Adl left Peshawar to join the Al Qaeda leadership in Sudan. ‘Adl brought his wife, who had just given birth to Khalid at the time, and his

\(^{152}\) Harun, Fadil. The War Against Islam. 100
\(^{153}\) Ibid.
\(^{154}\) Ibid.
\(^{156}\) Ibid.
\(^{157}\) Ibid.
eldest daughter Asia to Khartoum. The Egyptian operative spent four formidable years (1992-1996) in Sudan and climbed the Al Qaeda hierarchy to the highest echelons of influence, culminating as Bin Laden’s head of security and chief archivist, privy to background files on each operative. By 1993, he was a member of Al Qaeda’s military committee under the auspices of Banshiri and Atef.158

Thirteen years older than Bin Laden, the former policeman struck a close friendship with the Saudi construction heir during the struggle against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Despite the adapted laqb of Abu Hafs (father of Hafs), Atef’s wife had only given birth to daughters. When his kunyah was questioned by acquaintances, he typically responded: “Since I know God will bless me with a son one day, I have already selected his name. I might as well take the honored title.”159 By Omar Bin Laden’s account, his “father loved Mohammed Atef as much as one man can love another.”160 Due to the close bond and Atef’s gregarious demeanor, the Bin Laden children revered the burly Egyptian as another uncle.

In contrast to Atef, ‘Adl was notoriously difficult to get a long with and was not the type to crack jokes. An ISI interrogation of Muhammad Hasan Ghulam Rabbani, an Al Qaeda operative who dealt with ‘Adl, attested years later, “other member of the organization did not want to work with or for Saif al-Adel” partly “because he did not get along with people, nor did he trust people.”161 His alleged deference for Egyptian born

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160 Ibid.
operatives was evident to acquaintances. According to Abu Jandal’s memoir, “the jihadis from the Arabian Peninsula didn’t like him much and relations between them were often strained.”\textsuperscript{162} To add insult to injury, ‘Adl “threatened them on many an occasion.”\textsuperscript{163}

During the early years of the movement, Al Qaeda’s network was “hierarchical,” characterized by a conglomerate of a hundred some odd “loyalists” of Bin Laden who had sworn a \textit{bayat}, an oath of allegiance to him or Atef.\textsuperscript{164} Bin Laden opted for the \textit{Shura} model, and Al Qaeda comprised of a \textit{Shura majlis}, tantamount to an executive policy-making branch, and select committees for military, finance, media, political, religious and security affairs.\textsuperscript{165} As the head of Bin Laden’s security committee, ‘Adl was mandated with the task of securing the guesthouses and estates the Saudi frequented through a vast security apparatus involving a litany of “praetorian” guards known as the Black Guard.\textsuperscript{166} Selection for the Black Guard was contingent on a meticulous review of the operative’s qualifications, particularly their family history and prior combat experience.\textsuperscript{167} If selected by the military committee, the operative would undergo advanced training under Atef and ‘Adl’s tutelage. Training consisted of a course in the usage of “Sam-7 and Stinger ground-to-air missiles with an average range of six kilometers.”\textsuperscript{168}

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\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Jones, Seth G. \textit{Hunting in the Shadows: The Pursuit of Al Qa’ida since 9/11}. New York: W.W. Norton &. 2012. 105. Print
\textsuperscript{167} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Seth Jones. 7 Nov. 2013.
\end{flushleft}
Contrary to common wisdom, Al Qaeda operated under the dictum “centralization of decision, decentralization of execution.” Bin Laden chose targets for their geopolitical importance, but Al Qaeda’s military council planned operations down to the last detail. In short, the Saudi played a negligible role operationally. Large operations including: the U.S.S. Cole bombings and the 9/11 hijackings necessitated numerous meetings of the military committee. According to Abu Jandal, “Sheikh Osama and Abu Hafs took the lead, other al-Qaeda military commanders, notably Saif al-Adel and Abu Mohammed al-Masri, prepared strategies for the attacks.” To this day, ‘Adl and Abu Muhammad top the FBI’s most wanted list due to their key operational roles in every major Al Qaeda plot.

Bin Laden tasked Sayf al ‘Adl to orchestrate operations targeting American peacekeeping troops. To carry out Bin Laden’s wishes, ‘Adl formed relations with Colonel Suleiman Muhammad Suleiman, a leading member of the NIF’s security service who was in charge of special operations in Somalia. In the spring of 1993, ‘Adl operating under the alias Omar al-Sumali travelled from Nairobi to Ras Kambooni, Somalia along with Ali Mohammad, Abu Ubaidah al Banshiri, Mohamad Sadiq Odeh, and Muhammad Atef to open a training camp. During his trip along the Kenyan coast, ‘Adl took note of potential American targets, particularly Mombassa. He described the locale in his subsequent report as “an island that teem(ed) with foreigners who(‘d) stroll all over the place.” Furthermore, it was a target rich environment because “American army soldiers

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172 FBIS GMP20030508000135
173 AFGP-2002-600113
(took) their R&R there” and the island’s “security situation (was) terrible.” In addition, the Egyptian operative conducted an extensive analysis of the regional tribes including the: Bajuni, Ogaden, and Jal Jaal. Elucidating their political interests was paramount for Al Qaeda to take advantage of the sectarian strife. Al Qaeda’s relations with Ogadan, a tribe located in “southeastern Ethiopia,” who enjoyed an alliance with the Hawiya, aligned with Mohamad Farah Aideed would prove particularly useful in furthering the movement’s war against the far enemy.

In a show of strength, ‘Adl and his fellow operatives, with extensive combat experience, conducted a series of raids on UN peacekeeping forces. In one “ambush” of Belgium forces, ‘Adl recounted that Al Qaeda militants “heard the engine noise of a Belgium patrol car, stopped the car and shot one of them in the head,” decisively enveloping the convoy and shooting another soldier “in the leg” as well as an additional one. According to his account, the operation forced Brussel’s hand, and Belgium peacekeeping forces in Somalia were forced to extricate the war-torn country. In another operation to secure Al Qaeda’s beach held in Ras Kambuni, an assault against Indian peacekeeping forces was conducted. ‘Adl recounted that during the early days of the camp, Indian forces landed a helicopter in the peninsula bordering Kenya. In a swift response, a militant under ‘Adl’s command “lifted his RPG and launched a grenade”

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It should be noted that the letter is not dated. Given, the basic timeline of Al Qaeda’s activity in the Horn of Africa, it would make sense that the letter was written in the spring of 1993.

174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
aimed squarely on the helicopter, detonating “in front” of it – coercing an Indian withdrawal.\textsuperscript{178}

Despite early successes, ‘Adl became increasingly agitated by the recklessness of the Somali youth who trained at the camp, nicknamed “Armu.”\textsuperscript{179} The Al Marihan tribe was reportedly riddled by disunity, inhibiting an effective command structure, incensing a military man like ‘Adl. He was beside himself when Somali militants engaged in military confrontation with peacekeeping forces, without the go ahead of the Al Qaeda leadership. According to Harun’s memoir, ‘Adl subjected the Somalis to withering criticism, instigating an angry response by the indigenous for what they saw as Arab encroachment into their internal affairs.\textsuperscript{180}

‘Adl expressed his frustration in a series of letters to his father-in-law. Hamid, an experienced tactician, did his utmost to prop up ‘Adl’s morale and encourage his son-in-law to target American interests in the region, given Washington’s humanitarian intervention in Somalia. Hamid ominously referred to Al Qaeda’s team on the ground as a “hunter aiming his rifle at the dead branch of a tree” i.e. Somalia. Unexpectedly, “a bald eagle” i.e. U.S. forces “land(ed) on the branch of the tree, directly in line with the rifle.”\textsuperscript{181} Rhetorically, Hamid asked ‘Adl “Shouldn’t the hunter pull the trigger to kill the eagle or at least bloody it?”\textsuperscript{182} In short, Hamid encouraged ‘Adl to target the far enemy as a means of undermining the international system local enemies operated within. He wrote,

The American bald eagle has landed within range of our rifles. You can kill it or leave it

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} Harun, Fadil. War against Islam. 174
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} AFGP-2002-600113
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
permanently disfigured. If you do that, you will have saved Sudan, Yemen, Bab al-Mandab, the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and the waters of the Nile. Could you want more magnificent objectives of war than those?  

In contrast to the Islamist rhetoric of Bin Laden and Zawahiri, Hamid and ‘Adl coached their blatant anti-Americanism in postcolonial terms rather than Salafist rhetoric. 

Regardless, ‘Adl played a vital role in facilitating the American withdrawal from Somalia. According to Jack Cloonan, a former FBI agent, ‘Adl commanded either “a four- or five-man team inside Mogadishu,” training Farah Aideed’s militiamen who shot down an American Black Hawk using stinger misses (‘Adl’s signature weapon) in October 1993. The operation claimed the lives of eighteen American servicemen, infamously known as the Black Hawk Down affair. Although ‘Adl would only be indicted by the FBI for his role in the Embassy Bombings five years later, at that point the former commando had reached the Bureau’s attention. 

Al Qaeda’s activity in the Horn Africa continued unabated. With the help of ‘Adl, Al Qaeda made further inroads into Somalia, through the establishment of forward operating bases. On January 17, 1994, the Egyptian operative issued a report on his trip to “Al-Haddiyah” forest and his recommendations regarding the purchase of a “launch” to smuggle supplies via naval vessels and raise funds for the movement. Along his journey, ‘Adl found a capable captain, “who knew his way from Dar Al-Salam, Tanzania to ‘Aden, Yemen” – the sites of future attacks on U.S. diplomatic and military

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183 Ibid.  
184 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Vahid Brown. 18 Feb. 2014  
186 Ibid.  
187 AFGP-2002-600114
personnel.  

Although it is unclear whether Al Qaeda followed up on ‘Adl’s recommendation, the global network terror was in the beginning stages of orchestrating simultaneous truck bombings targeting U.S. embassies in Dar el Salem and Nairobi four years later. Bin Laden had demonstrated a proclivity towards “spectacular” operations against “‘hard’ targets.” However, at that juncture, Al Qaeda lacked the operational expertise to pull off simultaneous truck bombings. Two years earlier in December 1992, Al Qaeda targeted two hotels in Aden, Yemen frequented by US Marines en route to Somalia: the Movenpick Hotel and the Gold Mohur, to avenge what they saw as American encroachment into the Arabian peninsula. But the operation failed in spectacular fashion when the simultaneous detonation was botched – severing the arm of one of the assailants and failing to harm a single marine.

According to anonymous government sources, Hasan al Turabi, a close confidant of Sudanese President Omar al Bashir, facilitated meetings between Al Qaeda militants and Iranian intelligence operatives in the early 1990s – contacts the military committee benefited from immensely. Hezbollah acquiesced to train Al Qaeda operative in

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188 Ibid.
191 Joscelyn, Thomas. Iran’s Proxy War Against America. The Claremont Institute (September 2007)
Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Thomas Hegghammer. 3 Feb. 2014
As Dr. Hegghammer pointed out, the anonymous government report referenced by the 9/11 Commission Report was never corroborated by jihadist primary sources nor open source material of any kind. Also, there’s reason to doubt Jamal al Fadl’s testimony. Nonetheless, it is one of the few sources on Al Qaeda’s relations with Hezbollah.
exchange for weaponry. In 1994, ‘Adl along with Abu Talha al Sudani, Sayf al Islam al Masri, Abu Jaffer al Msri, and Salem al Masri travelled to the Beqqa Valley in Lebanon to train with Hezbollah’s 910 unit under the tutelage of Imad Mughniyah, head of operations at the time. ‘Adl established close ties with Mughniyah’s cousin and brother-in-law Mustapha Badr al Din years earlier, who had extensive military training as a member of Force 17 – Yassir Arafat’s praeatorian guard.

Unit 910, Hezbollah’s external operations unit, with Mughniyah and Badr al Din and its helm, honed a rigid standard operating procedure with the help of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards dating back to the Beirut Barracks bombings in 1982. Unit 910’s modus operandi resembled that of a state-sponsored intelligence unit. Its MO entailed rigid “compartmentalization,” locating “targets in advance, and collection of operational intelligence for creating a target file to be used when the order (was) given.” Furthermore, “recruitment, training, and worldwide deployment of terrorist cells and facilitators to be activated when the order (was) given.” ‘Adl invariably was impressed by Unit 910’s professionalism, and extensive measures taken to ensure operational security which appealed to the former commando.

The Al Qaeda operatives were taught courses in target identification, counterintelligence and how to carry out truck bombings. Mughniyah influenced Al Qaeda to adapt “coordinated, simultaneous attacks” as an integral part of the

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The website is held on Israeli servers and was likely a Mossad production to offer monetary rewards for actionable intelligence on Hezbollah’s top brass. The website offers a treasure trove of information on Hezbollah’s external operations including recent photos of its top operatives.
organization’s MO. It is likely based on ‘Adl’s treatise on *Security and Communications*, that the Al Qaeda operatives were taught case studies on Quds force operations that had gone awry.

One such operation was the assassination of former Iranian Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar in the kitchen of his Parisian apartment. In detail, ‘Adl recounted the blunders committed by the Quds force, an arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, that led to the capture of Ali Vakili Rad, one of the three assassins, who had escaped Paris for Switzerland. Approximately forty-eight hours after the assassination, the Parisian police found Bakhtiar’s corpse. In a matter of days, French intelligence managed to trace the assassination to two apartments in Istanbul, serving as the command center for the operation. With the Turkish government’s help, phone calls were traced connecting the Iranian intelligence to the assailants beyond reasonable doubt.

In his article, ‘Adl preceded to explain in layman’s terms how governments analyzed metadata collected from phone calls to analyze terror and criminal networks. He gave the fictional example of a twelve-second-phone call placed from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to illustrate the ease intelligence agencies acquire actionable intelligence from tracking a network of telephone numbers. In addition, the operative railed against mobile phones due to the threat they posed to operational security, but left his harshest criticism for e-mail communiqués.

A long-standing quid pro quo arrangement between Al Qaeda and Iranian intelligence operatives continued over the following years. According to a leaked Iranian

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194 Joselyn, Thomas. *Iran’s Proxy War Against America*. The Claremont Institute (September 2007)  
195 See Appendix B  
intelligence memorandum, Supreme Leader Khamenei viewed undermining American and Israeli economic and national security interests as paramount. Therefore, IRGC opted to collude with Al Qaeda, sharing operational expertise and munitions out of realpolitik considerations. Likewise, Al Qaeda saw relations with Tehran in pragmatic terms. An expose penned by Attiyat Abdul Rahman, a close confidante of Bin Laden, titled *The Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Issue*, clarifies Al Qaeda’s strategic calculus. Attiyah was forthright regarding ideological disagreements with the fundamentalist Shia movement that he frequently referred to as “rejectionist” because of the denomination’s failure to recognize the legitimacy of Abu Bakr as the Prophet’s rightful heir. But Attiyah paid accolades to the movement. He wrote rather sympathetically:

This populous faction with regional reach and rational temperament, satisfies Muslims with its seriousness and vanity of grandeur, so here it turned to God to come strive for justice of people to become goodness and truth God willing and not be transformed and sustained except by God. In other words, Hezbollah was successful as a mass movement because it adroitly framed its raison d’etre in Islamic terms, harkening back to an imagined bygone era just as Al Qaeda had done. As a result of Hezbollah’s “rational temperament,” Al Qaeda’s highest echelons sought quid pro quo arrangements with the movement as well as its primary backer the Quds force. In short, Bin Laden’s calculus was shaped by the proverb: “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Sayf al ‘Adl was tasked with maintaining Al Qaeda’s relations with Tehran. For Egyptian operatives, ties with the *Pasdaran* would prove pivotal. In contrast to Gulfi

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199 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
and North African jihadists, Egyptians were particularly conscious of their persona non grata status in Pakistan, a possible escape route during Operation Enduring Freedom, due to their involvement in a series of plots targeting Egyptian interests on Pakistani soil.\textsuperscript{202} In addition, ties between EIJ and the IRGC ran deep dating back to the Sadat Assassination.

In 1995, Sayf al ‘Adl with Abu Hafs and Harun at his side met Khaled Sheikh Muhamad (KSM) in Yemen. Although the American educated Pakistani was not a member of Al Qaeda at the time, the relationship between ‘Adl and KSM would indelibly shape the movement’s trajectory. At the time, “the Al Qaeda management was trying to firm up its presence” in Yemen.\textsuperscript{203} KSM was initially provided an “informational role” and participated in Al Qaeda-sponsored courses.\textsuperscript{204} In return, KSM provided assistance on “media projects.”\textsuperscript{205} The exact content of the meeting is unknown, but there is little doubt that even if the initial meeting was amicable, the relationship between ‘Adl and KSM quickly eroded due to ideological differences. KSM like Bin Laden primarily concerned himself with marketing the Al Qaeda brand at the expense of the movement’s operational capabilities. To a military man like ‘Adl, sacrificing Al Qaeda’s infrastructure in Afghanistan and external operations world wide was unimaginable, given the free reign the organization had in terms of training numerous recruits.

Due to unrelenting Saudi and American pressure, Bin Laden was exiled from Khartoum and was invited by Yunis Kahalis to settle in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. In

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{203} Harun, Fadil. War against Islam. 249
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
September 1996, ‘Adl and Atef accompanied the Bin Laden family on a chartered Learjet from Khartoum to Jalalabad.\textsuperscript{206} Bin Laden sat in the first aisle of the plane with ‘Adl as head of the security committee beside him.\textsuperscript{207} The trip was fraught with tension. ‘Adl was suspicious of the plane’s Russian pilot and frequently ventured into the cockpit to ensure that the Learjet was not flown directly to Saudi Arabia. After a brief stopover in Iran, which only exacerbated pervading conspiracies, the chartered plane landed safely in Jalalabad.\textsuperscript{208}

Since ‘Adl was last in Afghanistan, the political landscape had changed drastically. The Taliban under the auspices of Mullah Umar, had grown from a Qandahari vigilante militia into a full-fledged national movement with control over the vast swaths of territory.\textsuperscript{209} However Taliban control over Jalalabad would be short lived, and in March 1997 Mullah Umar requested Al Qaeda to move to Qandahar due to the threat of the Northern Alliance capturing the city. Bin Laden adopted a former Soviet military barrack known as Tarnak Farm thirty kilometers outside of Qandahar as Al Qaeda’s corporate headquarters.\textsuperscript{210} The camp consisted of eighty living-quarters, a mosque, an office complex, with a living capacity of around two hundred people. Living-quarters contained a “fortified subterranean chamber,” which ‘Adl refused to install in his own house out of frugalness.\textsuperscript{211} In addition, six underground tunnels were built, allowing Al Qaeda to evacuate its personnel a year later in the aftermath of the Embassy Bombings.

As head of the Security Committee, ‘Adl had the responsibility of organizing the


\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{211} Ibid. 85
recruitment of operatives and informants worldwide, working alongside the military committee’s operational network. To do so, the Egyptian operative built Al Qaeda’s “DAWA apparatus,” a network of Imams and clerics throughout the West who looked for potential recruits.212 The clerics included: Abu Dahda, Abu Qatada al Falistini, and Abu Hamza al Masri, effectively serving as “points of contact” (POC) between the Security Committee and potential recruits in the West.213

Al Qaeda’s simultaneous truck bombings targeting U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar el Salaam, Tanzania in August 1998 had taken five years of meticulous planning by the organization’s East Africa cell.214 A cadre of Al Qaeda operatives that had travelled to Somalia with ‘Adl to set up Camp Aramu, left for Kenya sometime after the Black Hawk Down Affair. In effect, the cell which did not include ‘Adl became Al Qaeda’s first operational cell beyond Afghanistan.215 The FBI indicted Abu Anas al Libi, who was just taken into custody this past October, and Sayf al ‘Adl for their roles in the embassy bombings. However, the operatives had little if any operational involvement in the actual plot, but ‘Adl as head of the Security Committee and Atef’s deputy certainly was aware of the operation’s general contours. Again, similar to the FBI’s ignorance regarding ‘Adl’s true name, the Bureau demonstrated a startling ineptitude.

In response to coverage of Abu Anas al Libi’s detainment by U.S. Special Forces, Adam Gadhan appeared in an Al-Sahab video taunting the intelligence community’s lapses, referencing Fadil Harun’s memoir to buttress his case. As Aviv Oreg the former

213 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Aviv Oreg. 20 Mar. 2014
215 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Aviv Oreg. 20 Mar. 2014
head of the Israel Defense Force’s (IDF) Al Qaeda desk and Professor Nelly Lahoud of the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, point out that the memoir is nothing short of the most important narration of the history of Al Qaeda. Due to the strict operational security enforced during the planning and execution of the Embassy bombings, even high-ranking Al Qaeda members consult the memoir as the movement’s official account of the operation. Based on Harun’s account, Gadhan declared that the Comoros native was “one of the exalted ones” that conducted the “strike on the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar el Salam.” Furthermore, the California born operative noted that Harun’s “memoirs do not mention that Abu Anas al Libi was with them” carrying out the deadly strike.

The night before the operation commenced, Abu Hafs instructed select militants at Tarnak Farm to evacuate the camp immediately for safe houses scattered throughout Qandahar. The next morning at 7:00 AM, the head echelons of the Al Qaeda hierarchy evacuated the camp. Bin Laden was accompanied with Abu Hafs, Ayman al Zawahiri, and Sayf al ‘Adl “to an unknown location.” That morning ‘Adl warned Abu Jandal that the latter “might be on the receiving end of the first strike” i.e. retaliatory cruise missiles.

The embassy bombings signified “the first act in the war against the Americans.” According to Harun’s memoir, acquaintances could see “signs of

216 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
221 Harun, Fadil. War against Islam. Pg. 371
happiness” in ‘Adl’s face. Despite the euphoria of carrying out simultaneous attacks on American embassies, ‘Adl was cognizant of the EIJ operation that had gone awry five years earlier due to the Egyptian government’s surveillance of militant chatter, and refrained from communicating with his esteemed deputy for several weeks. Four weeks after the operation, they met up in Kabul. ‘Adl’s uttered the first words: “How did you arrive?” Harun responded enigmatically, “by my feet oh Sayf.” While laughing Harun told ‘Adl, that they would talk more freely after they extricated from a crowd of militants. Stepping aside, Harun remarked, “you are the leader of security so stay away oh brother,” warning ‘Adl to remain low and out of sight of foreign intelligence services. Before leaving, ‘Adl told his close confidante they would speak face to face at a secure location at some point in the near future.

An astute political analyst, ‘Adl’s tacit support for the embassy bombings was partially due to his perception of the Clinton’s Administration’s feckless foreign policy and unwillingness to put boots on the ground to debilitate Al Qaeda’s infrastructure in Afghanistan and DAWA apparatus world wide. Based on his experience in Somalia, ‘Adl frequently disparaged the “American soldier” as “(un)fit for combat.” Despite the rhetoric, ‘Adl was a hardline pragmatist who had little interest in instigating a full-fledged American military intervention in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda’s forward operating base. As this discussion will address further, ‘Adl’s realpolitik would prove divisive.

In contrast to the Planes Operation, the Embassy Bombings adhered to ‘Adl’s

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223 Ibid.

rigid modus operandi. The former commando extrapolated from the Prophet Muhammad’s *hijra* (emigration form Mecca) the importance of taking precautions to maintain operational security and mislead the enemy, which would become staples of Sayf al ‘Adl’s stratagem. In his treatise on *Al Amn wal Istikhbarat* (Security and Intelligence), ‘Adl teased out ten lessons from the *hijra*:

1. ‘Ali was made to sleep on the bed of the Messenger (peace be upon him), in order to do *Tamwh* (manipulate and deceive) and blind the enemy.
2. The Messenger (peace be upon him) went to Abu Bakr at the time of *Qayllah* (siesta), when very few people remained outside of their homes.
3. When leaving the house of Abu Bakr, they did not leave through the main gate, in precaution of it being under surveillance.
4. They went towards the cave, in precaution of any ambush by the enemy which might have been planned on the road to Madinah.
5. And even the cave was not on the route to Madinah, and this was a tactic for misleading the enemy (to the wrong direction away) from following them.
6. They had intelligence continuously flowing to them from Makkah, by following the latest developments reported to them by ‘Abdullh ibn Abu Bakr.
7. They had a secure source of provisions, by means of Asma’ bint Abu Bakr.
9. Remaining in the cave for three days, to evade being captured by the enemy (and in order for the search against them to cool down).
10. The continuance of *Tamwh* (manipulation and deception) and *Sirriyyah* (secrecy) during movement (from place to place); as when a man asked Abu Bakr, “Who is this man who is with you?” Abu Bakr replied, “This man is guiding me the way.” And the man thought he meant the road, while Abu Bakr had intended the Upright Path.225

Evidently, Abu Bakr’s precautions to deceive the *Quraysh* and willingness to use actionable intelligence to compensate for the polytheists’ numeric superiority appealed to Sayf al ‘Adl. To some degree, ‘Adl displayed a holier than thou mentality, narcissistic enough to compare himself to an early companion and successor of the Prophet.

Regardless of the sincerity of ‘Adl’s classical contextualization, the former commando established an internal counterintelligence group of around fifty operatives to weed out potential informants and disseminated “bulletins” on maintaining operational

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security. Years earlier Al Qaeda suffered a massive intelligence leak when Jamal al Fadl opted to become an informant for the FBI, after he was caught embezzling money from the organization’s coffers. The bulletins instructed Al Qaeda operatives not to divulge information on their “activities.” ‘Adl echoed the advice his father-in-law gave to operatives departing Pakistan for East Africa in the early 1990s: do not “wear wrist watches on the right hand, as is the tradition with the Mujaheddin.”226 In addition, do “not travel with one’s wife, shave off one’s beard before travelling” on a mission.227

The counterintelligence group was successful in uncovering Abu Moutassem, an informant for the Jordanian intelligence service.228 Abu Moutassem was an Arab Afghan veteran who had fallen victim to a honey trap, and covertly videotaped while having intercourse. The Jordanian intelligence service used the tape to extort Abu Moutassem in gathering actionable intelligence on Al Qaeda’s activity in Jordan and weapons of mass destruction program, which ‘Adl played an instrumental role in forming in the mid 1990s.229 Days later after handing over the informant to the Taliban’s security services, ‘Adl with Abu Jandal at his side interrogated Abu Moutassem with characteristic ruthlessness.

Knowing full well that he would likely be brutally tortured, Moutassem made an attempt at small talk. The Jordanian exclaimed to ‘Adl, “Saif al-Adel, don’t you remember me from 1987 when were fighting the Soviets?” He went on, “I remember you

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227 Ibid.
you had an arm injury at Khost,” a reference to a visible scar on ‘Adl’s right forearm from an injury sustained during his days in Somalia.\textsuperscript{230} But Moutassem was unable to hold out long from the coercive interrogation. He quickly revealed that Jordanian intelligence officers showed him as well as Abu Issa, another informant, photos of top Al Qaeda operatives and demanded information on their identities and backgrounds.\textsuperscript{231} Although it is unlikely that the informants knew a great deal regarding ‘Adl’s background or his true name for that matter, they were able to provide intelligence on salient physical and behavioral features.

Sometime in 1999, after months of tracking the status of Ahmad Fadil al Nazal al Khalayelh better known by the kunyah Abu Musab al Zarqawi, ‘Adl got in contact with Zarqawi through Abu Qatada al Filistini.\textsuperscript{232} Jordanian authorities released Zarqawi, who had been detained for sedition against the Hashemite Kingdom and orchestrating an operation targeting American diplomats in Amman, just as Al Najun al Nar had done years earlier in Cairo. According to ‘Adl’s posthumous biography of Zarqawi, Al Qaeda prioritized collecting information on the whereabouts of “all pioneers of jihad who had participated in Jihad in Afghanistan” against Soviet forces.\textsuperscript{233} As a result, ‘Adl paid close attention to proceeding “military tribunals” on Zarqawi’s Islamist group: Al Tawhid.\textsuperscript{234}

The relationship between Abu Musab al Zarqawi and Usama Bin Laden got off to a poor start. Zarqawi refused to swear a bayah to Bin Laden, incensing the soft-spoken Saudi. ‘Adl who saw potential in the Jordanian firebrand convinced Bin Laden to give

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{231} AFGP-2002-800775
\item \textsuperscript{232} Al-Qa’ida Commander Writes Al-Zarqawi ‘Jihadist Biography http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/5092/ZAR20090817.pdf?sequence=3
\item \textsuperscript{233} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
$5,000 worth of seed money to Al Tawhid. Zarqawi and ‘Adl agreed to establish a training camp in Western Afghanistan for militants hailing from “Jordan, Turkey, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey.” ‘Adl wrote that Herat was determined to be a suitable location due to its close proximity to Iran. In addition, ‘Adl proposed the formation of “two stations in Tehran and Mashhad to facilitate arrival in and departure of brothers to and from Afghanistan.”235 ‘Adl went even further in elucidating the nature of Al Qaeda’s relations with Iran. He stated, the issue of smuggling operatives via Iran “prompted (them) to think of building good relations with some virtuous people in Iran” likely IRGC members who shared hostility “to the Americans and Israelis.”236 As this discussion will address further, Al Qaeda’s infrastructure throughout Herat and Mashhad would abet the Quds force smuggle ‘Adl and fellow Egyptian operatives into Tehran during the throes of the American invasion.237 But it is important to stress that the relationship was by no means an alliance, and Al Qaeda and Iran were frequently at odds with each other, leading to the loss of treasure and blood on both sides.

In August 1999, in retaliation for the Taliban’s slaying of eight Iranian diplomats, Quds force operatives targeted Mullah Omar’s Qandahar compound, detonating a “car bomb.”238 The explosion succeeded in killing a wife and son of the Taliban leader. Abu Hafs and Sayf al ‘Adl, who were residing at Al Qaeda’s guest house on the estate grounds, immediately assisted the victims and evacuated residents of the compound. Abu Hafs and ‘Adl’s help shored up Al Qaeda’s ties with the Taliban, which had been fraught with tension since Bin Laden’s arrival to Jalalabad in 1996. Three years later the Taliban

235 Ibid.
237 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Seth Jones. 7 Nov. 2013.
would bestow citizenship on Bin Laden and his top operatives including ‘Adl.

The following January, Al Qaeda held a terror summit at Tarnak Farm in celebration of *Eid al Fitr*, the breaking of the fast of Ramadan. The gathering was recorded in a silent film provided to The Sunday Times years later. Bin Laden accompanied by two bodyguards and ‘Adl arrived ceremoniously, to be greeted by Nasir al Wuhayshi, the current second and command of Al Qaeda and former secretary of Bin Laden. 239 Before Bin Laden launched a fiery anti-American tirade, ‘Adl who does his utmost to avoid being recorded was videotaped toying with the cameraman by shaking the recording device up and down. 240 The short episode, which only lasted several seconds at approximately 10:51 AM, brought a wide smile to the face of the Egyptian operative. Similar to his initial encounter with Mustapha Hamid a decade earlier, ‘Adl enjoyed wrecking havoc, a defining character trait that should give intelligence analysts and law enforcement a moment’s pause.

In his speech, Bin Laden implored attendants of the international terror summit, which included scores of children, to take the fight to the far enemy. Opposed to Bin Laden’s *takfiri* ideology which harkened back to the Prophet’s struggle against the polytheist Quraysh in Mecca, ‘Adl and Hamid couched Al Qaeda in anti-imperialist terms. In a series of tapes taken from Bin Laden’s Qandahar Compound by the U.S. intelligence community, Hamid outlined his vision in a lecture to Al Qaeda operatives in the late 1990s. He articulated the need for a “common enemy” to transcend “the obstacles

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240 IntelCenter: Know Thy Enemy Terrorism DVD Series: al-Qaeda V070: Osama bin Laden Tarnak Farms Address and Last Wills of 9-11 Hijackers Ziad Jarrah and Mohammed Atta. 3:35
that a ruling government puts before” local jihadist movements. Hamid provided the example of Egypt. He explained: “If you want to wage jihad in Egypt and win support from the people, then, you have to target a common enemy who everyone dislikes.”

Jews and the United States were deemed suitable for the role. Like his father-in-law, ‘Adl opted years earlier to forgo the struggle against the near enemy for the far one. Over the upcoming decade, ‘Adl would be implicated in a series of operations targeting synagogues spanning the globe, becoming an integral part of his MO.

Shortly after the terror summit, ‘Adl in conjunction with Abu Hafs orchestrated a series of plots against Jewish and Israeli targets in Australia. Jack Roche, an Australian covert to Islam who had trained in Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, testified that a meeting was held at the al Faruq camp regarding potential Jewish-Australian targets in early 2000. The attendees included Mustapha Hamid, Abu Hafs and Sayf al ‘Adl. At that time, ‘Adl plotted to assassinate Rabbi Joseph Gutnick, an affluent supporter of Israel’s settlement project in the West Bank. The diamond magnate was a major contributor to Binyamin Netanyahu as well, making him an appealing target for Al Qaeda. According to Melbourne police who raided Jemaah Islammiah safe houses, Al Qaeda operatives on the ground kept meticulous maps of Gutnick’s home and a local Synagogue. In addition to the Gutnick plot, ‘Adl and Abu Hafs directed Roche to return home for the purposes of conducting reconnaissance on Jewish and Israeli targets.

Professor Miller’s book as yet to be published. He was kind enough to allow me access to a draft of his chapter on Mustapha Hamid.
242 Ibid.
Roche attempted to recruit local Islamists to conduct surveillance on the Israeli embassy in Canberra, but the operation was dropped due to logistical challenges.\(^{245}\)

In April 2001, Sayf al ‘Adl was informed of Khalid Sheikh Muhammad’s 9/11 plans.\(^{246}\) The Egyptian operative voiced his vehement opposition to the operation out of an adroit cost-benefit analysis, arguing that an American retaliation would cripple the organization’s infrastructure in Afghanistan and DAWA apparatus worldwide, because countries would be forced to cooperate with Washington D.C.\(^{247}\) ‘Adl’s strategic doctrine emphasized “qualitative,” low-risk operations targeting American economic interests just as the first generation of Muslims had done vis a vis the Quraysh. Even, Bin Laden admitted on multiple occasions that if successful the attacks would instigate “World War III,” debilitating Al Qaeda’s military capabilities.\(^{248}\) In contrast to the soft-spoken Saudi, ‘Adl had little interest in bearing the considerable costs of the operation and made his opposition clear. To Sayf al ‘Adl’s chagrin, Usama Bin Laden ignored the Egyptian operative, saying “I will make it happen even if I do it by myself.”\(^{249}\)

Despite ‘Adl’s opposition, the Egyptian operative played an important but ambiguous role in the hijackings. As a head of Al Qaeda’s Security committee, which was charged with recruitment of operatives world wide, ‘Adl recruited a number of the


Sayf al ‘Adl’s diary which remains classified, outlines his involvement in orchestrating 9/11. The intelligence community recovered it from a Saudi safe house in 2004. It is referenced in several Combatant Status Reviews published by Wikileaks and even ones declassified by the Department of Defense.


\(^{248}\) Harun, Fadil. *War against Islam*. Pg. 371

hijackers via POC’s in Europe. However it is clear based on his essays posted on *Minbar al Tawhid* and *Al shabakah al liberaliya al Arabiya* (the liberal Arab web), ‘Adl was intimately involved in internal Al Qaeda discussions regarding the operation’s merits. The former commando offered a unique revisionist history of American Middle East policy dating back to Thomas Jefferson’s campaign against piracy off the cost of Africa to properly contextualize “the Goals of the New York Strike.” He wrote: Al Qaeda’s “main objective, therefore, was to deal a strike to the head of the snake at home to smash its arrogance.” Furthermore, the “ultimate objective” of the attacks “against the head of the serpent was to prompt it to come out of its hole” and engage the *mujahidin* in open combat.

By government accounts, 9/11 commenced with the assassination of Ahmad Shah Masud. The hit on the infamous Northern Alliance leader was a professional operation that required meticulous planning on the part of Sayf al ‘Adl and Abu Hafs. ‘Adl with the help of Yassir al Siri, a former EIJ operative who had received asylum in the United Kingdom, acquired letters of endorsement from the Islamic Observatory Centre for two Al Qaeda operatives posing as journalists. The Moroccan and Tunisian operatives that carried out the assassination hid an explosive behind the camera lens of a recording device, killing the unsuspecting Northern Alliance leader.

Based on Guantanamo Bay Combatant Status Reviews, ‘Adl went to great lengths

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252 Ibid.
253 Ibid.
to maintain the operational integrity of the 9/11 plot, despite his ardent opposition. A day after Ahmad Shah Masud’s assassination, an operative recounted to ‘Adl a dream he had of al shabab (young men) hijacking an airline and ramming into skyscrapers. The former commando directed the fellow operative to not share his dream to anyone, in order to ensure operational security.\(^\text{256}\)

There is little documentation elucidating ‘Adl’s initial reaction to the 9/11 hijackings. However by all accounts, Mustapha Hamid was furious with Al Qaeda’s military and intelligence committees for what he saw as an ill-conceived operation. Hamid who was frequently at odds with Bin Laden, reportedly wept when asked by his then-wife Rabiah Hutchinson what had occurred. He categorized the hijackings as “a disaster” and exclaimed several times “Y’Allah (oh God), what have they done?” – anticipating an overwhelming military response and his subsequent evacuation of Qandahar.\(^\text{257}\)

The Allied aerial bombardment Al Qaeda and Taliban targets throughout Afghanistan particularly Qandahar during the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom pummeled Sayf al ‘Adl and his cadre. ‘Adl published his recollection of the bombing campaign Qafilah al Shuhada al Nassaiyah ala ard Qandahar al abiya (Caravan of women martyrs on the land of proud Qandahar) in Sawt al Jihad (Voice of Jihad), which was later disseminated via jihadist online forums.\(^\text{258}\) On October 28th, ‘Adl was at his compound with Abu Muhamad al Ubaid, Abdel Rahman al Masri, Abu Usama


al Falistini, Abu Hussein al Masri, and Faruq al Suri. At approximately 1:00 AM in the morning, he sensed danger and “felt worried.”\footnote{Ibid.} In response to the looming threat, ‘Adl and another operative “collected (them)selves” within “five to seven seconds” to figure out what was going on.

Suddenly they heard “the sound of a large explosion far away.”\footnote{Ibid.} They quickly surmised that an American cruise missile directly hit the second house, which also served as the Wafa Qandahar headquarters, a Saudi based NGO formerly known as Tawfiq.\footnote{The video of Salim Hamdan’s interrogation at a CIA black site was declassified during Hamdan vs. Rumsfeld (U.S. 2006). U.S. Military Videos and Photos. “Osama Bin Laden’s Driver – US Interrogation techniques in action first time released!!” Youtube. 50:07 Posted on 4/13/2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xp5o8BPJk-I} The headquarters was in close vicinity to the Pakistani consulate.\footnote{Ibid.} After seeing the carnage, ‘Adl immediately went to the nearest hospital to check on the casualties. Another militant informed ‘Adl of the death of a former Al Faruq camp trainer. Shortly after, the former Egyptian commando returned to a new forward operating base on the Banjway Road, which was taking fire from helicopters.\footnote{FBIS GMP20031029000060} The men of the village sent their wives and children in cars exposed to gunfire. Allegedly an American bombardment hit the cars head on, killing several women and children. ‘Adl tried to reassure Abu Usama al Tazi whose two children had been killed, that they “will be brought” to “paradise the day of resurrection God willing.”\footnote{Sawt al Jihad. Second Edition. September 2003} The Egyptian operative blamed the loss of life on the Taliban for evacuating their defensive positions in face of overwhelming American military might and even went as far as labeling them traitors.

Despite Sayf al ‘Adl’s ruthlessness and lack of regard for indiscriminately
targeting civilians, the carnage had a profound effect on the operative. ‘Adl proceeded to visit his family, who he had not seen since moving to Kabul, to notify his wife and children on what had occurred. He asked his family, “Have you heard what happened?” 265 “Sister Um Ali al Yafi was martyred with her husband in that circumstance. I ask God to beget me” offspring, “martyrs with their likeness.”266 After blessing his five children: Asia, Khalid, Hafsa, Inas, and Ruqiya, ‘Adl left his family, returning to Qandahar effectively under siege.267

265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid.
Ironically the third chapter of this discussion poses its own unique challenges. The sheer quantity of primary sources including: essays penned by Sayf al ‘Adl on jihadist forums and his father-in-law’s blog dwarf the number of primary sources on the Egyptian’s earlier life. However, sorting through the ambiguity of his incarceration in Tehran and elucidating his current role in the organization remain the greatest obstacles to any analyst. This discussion will consult select primary sources in conjunction with interviews conducted by the author to narrate the operative’s life on the run and the ascendance of his stratagem in the years prior to Bin Laden’s death, despite his estrangement from the Saudi construction heir.

Sayf al ‘Adl vividly recounted the devastation of the American aerial bombardment of Afghanistan in *Risala ila ahlna fi Iraq wa al khalij* (letter to our people in Iraq and the Gulf). According to his estimation, during the first night of Operation Enduring Freedom in early October, an excess of 400 cruise missiles destroyed close to a quarter of Tarnak Farm, which Al Qaeda had evacuated in anticipation of the bombardment earlier that month. After several weeks, the bombing campaign resulted in the “almost complete destruction of the housing compound both on the interior and the exterior.” But to his satisfaction, “none of (their) military sites in the region, which (were) located not more than three hundred meters from the housing compound, were bombed.”

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268 Intel Center’s Translation of *Advice for Mujahidin in Iraq: Lessons Learned from Afghanistan*. [http://www.intelcenter.com/Qaeda-Guerrilla-Iraq-v1-0.pdf](http://www.intelcenter.com/Qaeda-Guerrilla-Iraq-v1-0.pdf)

269 Ibid.

270 Ibid.
Sayf al ‘Adl, with impeccable military credentials, categorized the American invasion of Afghanistan in three stages: 1) Engaged in “psychological” warfare via media outlets around the world, effectively demonstrating its overwhelming military might as it would do in Operation Shock and Awe. 2) Unleashed a paralyzing bombing campaign to interrupt communication and basic utilities on the ground. 3) Sent in ground troops to occupy Afghanistan as well as kill and capture enemy combatants.

Regardless of the American military’s light footprint, Operation Enduring Freedom succeeded in debilitating Al Qaeda’s infrastructure, if not obliterating it altogether. According to ‘Adl’s estimate, out of 1900 Arab Afghans around 350 of them were “martyred in total” and 180 left Afghanistan.271 Approximately two hundred and fifty Arab families were forced to flee Afghanistan.272 In an article in the Saudi jihadist magazine Tahta zillal al ramh (Under the Shadow of Lances) titled Amaliya al Kamanduz ala Bait Amir al Muimeen (Operation of the Commandos on the house of the Amir of the believers), ten days into October Lockheed C-130 Hercules planes pounded Qandahar. In his account of the engagement, ‘Adl claimed the “champion” of the battle was Hamza al Zabil, who bravely engaged the American air force while moving the corpses of martyrs, who required burial aligned with the precepts of Islamic law. The Egyptian operative wrote, that “the news in Qandahar spread and with it great glee for Muslims,” due to the heroism demonstrated by the militants.273

In another edition of Under the Shadow of Lances, Sayf al ‘Adl recounted a battle

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272 Ibid.
273 Ibid.
that had taken place around the same time in Afghani Baluchistan, along the Pakistani border which he labeled “southern Qandahar.” According to his recollection, a Balushi “military training camp” stationed in the mountains, a natural defensive position, was bombed by the American Air Force in conjunction with “rockets,” most likely shot from American naval vessels. Then ground troops were sent in to secure the position. Around thirty-one militants armed with light weaponry defended the encampment from upward of a thousand coalition troops, successfully injuring four hundred soldiers. To frame the fecklessness of the American soldier, ‘Adl referenced the Quranic verse 3:112, implicitly comparing the militants of the camp to the early adherents of Islam fighting the polytheists. Although blunt and realistic in his communiqués to top Al Qaeda leaders, the letters that he published on jihadist forums portrayed the defense of Afghanistan in a romantic light, carefully harkening back to an imagined bygone era.

The devastation of Al Qaeda Al Askari was evident within weeks of the American invasion. Abu Hafs al Masri was killed by an air strike on his Kabul compound in the beginning of November. Immediately after, ‘Adl was named Abu Hafs’s successor as head of the military committee. According to Harun’s account which couched Al Qaeda’s hierarchy in tiers and portfolios, at that point ‘Adl was “the second ranking man” in the movement. For all intensive purposes, he was higher in the movement’s hierarchy than Bin Laden’s official deputy Ayman al Zawahiri. Regardless of the categorization’s accuracy, the death of Abu Hafs marked the two year apex of ‘Adl’s operational significance, who was by all accounts sidelined operationally by his house arrest starting

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274 Ibid.
275 Ibid.
276 Harun, Fadil. War Against Islam. Pg. 94
Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nelly Lahoud. 13 Mar. 2014
in the summer of 2003. But as this discussion will address further, his influence on the

evolution of Al Qaeda’s strategic doctrine through essays on military tactics and
intelligence gathering had yet to reach its peak.

In December 2001, he commanded the defense of the Qandahar airport remotely
via radio from Southern Afghanistan. However the last stand proved folly, and the
militants who were only armed with light arms and rocket propelled grenades were no
match to the well-equipped American Air Force. According to Noman Benotman, during
the lopsided battle ‘Adl frequently radioed in for top commanders to evacuate, ensuring a
modicum of Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities. By the engagement’s end, the scores
of the militants that were killed in action were inexperienced fighters, with little
operational significance to the organization. Fighters involved in the battle
overwhelmingly blamed ‘Adl for the senseless bloodshed.

Sayf al ‘Adl’s notorious chauvinism toward Gulfi militants reared its head in the
defense of Al Qaeda’s infrastructure in Afghanistan, contributing to his unpopularity.
‘Adl derided Yemeni militants fighting on the frontlines as Sufi “dervishes,” an insulting
remark to any takfiri militant. The Gulfi fighters who were braving the natural
elements took exception at the comment and the special treatment the former commando
received. Given his rank, ‘Adl toted a mobile phone and car keys along the front lines,
while enjoying a local residence for the frigid nights.

According to ‘Adl, select precautions were taken in the run up to the defense of

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277 Tawil, Camille. “The Other Face of Al Qaeda” Qulliam Foundation. 11/17/2010 Accessed through:
http://www.oss.net/dynamaster/file_archive/101224/24b2c62a3e00c1100a0d972b1b436872/2010-12-
23%20The%20Other%20Face%20of%20Al%20Qaeda.pdf
278 Intel Center’s Translation of Advice for Mujahidin in Iraq: Lessons Learned from Afghanistan.
http://www.intelcenter.com/Qaeda-Guerrilla-Iraq-v1-0.pdf
279 Tawil, Camille. “The Other Face of Al Qaeda” Qulliam Foundation. 11/17/2010
280 FBIS GMP20021110000128
281 Ibid.
the Safar Airport, roughly thirty kilometers outside of Qandahar. As commander he ensured that the militants “did not form large military sectors so that the air force did not cause massive losses,” and relied on nimble ten man units armed with SAMs on Corolla pick up trucks. 282 ‘Adl made several references to the efficiency and easy maneuverability of the Japanese truck, and even joked with other militants on several occasions that “if the Japanese had seen the vehicles in action, they would have used them for marketing advertisements.” In addition to well-hidden trenches, a sewage system that had long been out of use was used to facilitate the movement of militants back and forth to the front lines, giving fighters a small tactical advantage. Above all, Sayf al ‘Adl’s battle plan emphasized mobility and used “air defense weapons, SAM-7 missiles, Stinger missiles, launchers, and other guns on vehicles” to maintain a degree of operational flexibility.

Despite careful preparation, defeat at the Safar Airport dealt a crushing blow to Al Qaeda’s infrastructure in Afghanistan and culminated in the erosion of the Taliban’s good will. At the time, ‘Adl told remaining militants that Bin Laden had no more instructions and that contingency plans for the American invasion had never been drawn up. 284 At that point, a wholesale evacuation of Afghanistan was inevitable, so Al Qaeda could fight another day.

Egyptian born operatives were in a particularly perilous position. Fleeing to Pakistan was not an option. The memory of Islamabad’s March 1993 campaign against Egyptian militants based in Pakistan, weighed on the minds of Egyptian jihadists,

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282 Ibid.
283 Ibid.
including Sayf al ‘Adl.\textsuperscript{285} As a result, ‘Adl along with a cadre of Al Qaeda operatives which included members of the Bin Laden family under his aegis left for Iran. The Iranian National Guard provided Arab families, not merely Al Qaeda operatives, a safe haven.\textsuperscript{286} In the throes of the American invasion, the Egyptian operative negotiated with elements of the Quds force to smuggle Al Qaeda operative for the relative safety of Iran.\textsuperscript{287} Using a network of contacts in the Gulf, ‘Adl who was operating under the alias Ibrahim raised the required capital for top Al Qaeda operatives to live in apartments in Tehran.\textsuperscript{288} As long as Al Qaeda refrained from conducting operations on Saudi soil, POCs in the Gulf contributed substantially to the organization’s coffers.\textsuperscript{289} It was not the first time that Sayf al ‘Adl engaged in financial transactions with Gulfis. Allegedly, ‘Adl instructed Salim al Baluchi, a Saudi businessman and former Arab Afghan, to buy jewelry for Asma in Dubai. Whether or not the request was sincere or a ploy to launder money through \textit{hawala} is unknown.\textsuperscript{290}

The Saudi-based NGO \textit{Wafa al Igatha al-Islamiyah} better known as al Wafa, coincidentally also the name of Mustapha Hamid’s first wife, was instrumental in smuggling Al Qaeda operatives to and from Iran. It was likely employed by the Quds force to facilitate ‘Adl’s travel as well. Al Wafa was established by Sheikh Abdallah al

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\textsuperscript{285} Hamid, Mustapha. Salib fi Sumah al Qandahar. 40
\textsuperscript{288} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Seth Jones. 7 Nov. 2013.
\textsuperscript{289} Jones, Seth G. \textit{Hunting in the Shadows: The Pursuit of Al Qa’ida since 9/11}. New York: W.W. Norton \\&., 2012. 87 Print.
\textsuperscript{290} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Thomas Hegghammer. 3 Feb. 2014
\end{flushleft}
Rayis and set up offices throughout Afghanistan in early or mid 2000 with the Taliban’s sanction. The shell NGO was also involved in Al Qaeda’s CRBN program, attempting to procure chemical and biological weapons in concert with Yazid Suffat, the organization’s CRBN expert.

In addition, select operatives who would play an instrumental role in forming Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in 2006 including: Nasir al Wuhayshi and Said al Shihri were smuggled into Iran under the auspices of Al Wafa.

In his posthumous biography of Zarqawi, Sayf al ‘Adl recounted his travel to Iran, crediting Gulfi militants for the funds and Gulbud Hekmatyar for handling the logistics. He wrote:

We began to flock to Iran one after the other. The brothers in the Arabian Peninsula, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates who were outside Afghanistan, had already arrived. They possessed abundant funds. We set up a central leadership circle and subordinate circles. We began to rent apartments for the brothers and some of their families. The brothers of the Islamic Party of Gulbudd in Hekmatyar offered us satisfactory help in this field. They provided us with apartments and some farms that they owned. They put them at our disposal.

The “central leadership circle” would eventually morph into Al Qaeda’s management council, an enigmatic group of top operatives charged with raising funds for the organization’s global network and orchestrating attacks from North Africa to North America.

Sayf al ‘Adl emphasized a rigid standard operating procedure regarding the

292 Ibid.
295 Al-Qa’ida Commander Writes Al-Zarqawi ‘Jihadist Biography’ Translated by Bryn Mwar http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu:8080/dspace/handle/10066/5092?show=full
selection of secure safe houses, which often came in the form of apartment complexes, houses, store fronts, or hotel rooms.\textsuperscript{296} He stipulated a number of precautions to ensure operational security.

1) It should be distant from vital targets that are under surveillance
2) It should be far from disreputable places—crime or drug scenes.
3) It should be far from crowded and popular areas since every stranger raises suspicion.
4) It should blend in with surrounding environment.
5) It should be a place where constant surveillance is difficult.
6) It should have several exits, preferably secret ones.
7) The house should be convenient for the purposes for which it is used.\textsuperscript{297}

Given the operative’s MO, ‘Adl likely spent his initial months, when he was not in Afghanistan orchestrating the defense of Al Qaeda’s infrastructure and external operations, regularly moving between safe houses along the Iranian-Afghani border.

Ascertaining Iran’s calculus in permitting scores of Al Qaeda operatives to seek safety is difficult, if not impossible. But it is evident, that during the initial stages of the American invasion, Al Qaeda operatives took full advantage of the relative tranquility and the political connections “the office of Hekmatyar” offered to regroup.\textsuperscript{298} In one memoir titled \textit{40 yawman tahta al qasf} (forty days under bombardment) published on jihadist online forums, an anonymous militant candidly recounted his stay in Iran. Immediately after crossing the border, Iranian police detained the militant and his cohorts, handing them over to the IRGC. The militants were placed in one of multiple “hotels under strong protection” of Iranian intelligence.\textsuperscript{299} In addition to receiving medical care they were assisted by their Iranian hosts in arranging travel back to Afghanistan. After a week, the guard was lifted and they were allowed to escape from the hotel. Communicating with “one brother from the peninsula” i.e. Arabian Peninsula, the

\textsuperscript{296} FBIS GMP20040716000196
\textsuperscript{297} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid.
logistics and appointed time of their return to Afghanistan were ironed out.\textsuperscript{300}

Reports surfaced that Ayman al Zawahiri, who tends to switch safe houses every four hours, sought safe haven in Iran for a brief period during the summer of 2002.\textsuperscript{301} Then President Khatami was briefed by his security minister that Bin Laden’s deputy took up residence in a safe house under the auspices of Iranian intelligence in Zabol, along the Pakistani and Afghani border.\textsuperscript{302} In vein, Khatami ordered Zawahiri’s arrest, but the former head of EIJ mysteriously escaped Iran without a trace. The bizarre report and the anecdotal evidence provided by an anonymous jihadist suggest that rogue elements of the IRGC pursued a freelance policy regarding Al Qaeda detainees, without necessarily consulting the civilian government. But again, it is necessary to acknowledge the inherent ambiguity of Al Qaeda-Iranian relations, and the arrangement should not be categorized as a coalition by any means.

By all accounts, Sayf al ‘Adl’s maintained a hard lined pragmatism, especially when it came to his emphasis on small, tactically simple operations. Al Qaeda sought to execute a second wave of attacks on the American homeland after 9/11, using non-Arab operatives including: Richard Reid, Binyam Mohamad, and Jose Padilla. Allegedly, ‘Adl had sent the British-born Reid to KSM in Karachi, before attempting to detonate a transatlantic flight with PETN.\textsuperscript{303} Mohamad and Padilla came to ‘Adl and KSM in March 2002, who were based in Karachi at the time, proposing to detonate a “dirty-bomb” in the

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{301} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Ronald Sandee. 31 Mar. 2014
\textsuperscript{302} FBIS EUP20030905000135
U.S. ‘Adl responded that the operation was too intricate and that Al Qaeda favored simpler ones, coercing America to roll back its involvement in Afghanistan and secure the release of militants from Guantanamo Bay.

Sayf al ‘Adl’s modus operandi which stressed low-risk operations targeting American geopolitical interests never wavered. In his mind, it was sometimes necessary to reign in overzealous recruits and ensure that they did not launch operations that would provoke an overwhelming military response further debilitating Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities. He wrote emphatically in *Al Amn wal Istikhbarat*:

> You need a great deal of youth to refrain from jihadist activity when you see incessant elimination of vital activities related to losses among levels of the organization and confronting the increased opposition of the youth regarding organizations when an enemy surprises (and inflicts) a few losses.

For ‘Adl, Al Qaeda’s evacuation of Afghanistan and the international effort to dismantle his network of POCs in the aftermath of 9/11, warranted “cessation” of external operations to reevaluate the organization’s long term stratagem. But to his horror, Al Qaeda’s highest echelon of decision-making failed to entertain a reevaluation period and continued to carry out ill thought out attacks without ascertaining their likelihood of success and conducting a meticulous cost-benefit analysis.

In January 2002, elements of the Pakistani Taliban abducted Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl, who was conducting an investigation on Richard Reid’s Pakistani facilitator. Interrogation of Sayf al ‘Adl’s brother-in-law Sharif al Masri

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304 JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment of Muhammad Binyam

305 Ibid.

306 Adl, Sayf. Security and Intelligence. (May 2011)

revealed that the former commando was informed of Pearl’s abduction and instructed KSM, based in Karachi, to take charge of the operation, effectively coopting it for Al Qaeda. However, ‘Adl told KSM that it would be ill advised to execute the Israeli-American journalist, which the American educated operative disregarded. Disagreement between the two high-ranking operatives would continue unabated.

In a letter to KSM the following June, Sayf al ‘Adl lambasted the alleged 9/11 mastermind for his gross miscalculations and lack of foresight. Due to the “successive disasters” that had befallen Al Qaeda in every corner of its global network spanning the Horn of Africa to America, ‘Adl instructed his preeminent rival to “halt all external actions,” even in defiance of Bin Laden’s explicit orders. The then head of the military committee wrote:

My Beloved brother, stop all foreign actions, stop sending people to captivity, stop devising new operations, regardless of whether orders come or do not come from Abu-Abdullah (Bin Laden). Our adherents have lost confidence in us and in our ability to manage the action, and they wonder, what has befallen us.

‘Adl’s scathing rebuke of Al Qaeda’s lack of foresight was reminiscent of Mustapha Hamid’s harsh words for Bin Laden in the aftermath of Battle of Jalalabad over a decade earlier. The former commando pledged to message Bin Laden his concerns that Al Qaeda had gotten out of control, and no longer pursued sensible actions that promoted its interests.

Despite falling out of favor with Al Qaeda’s top leadership, Sayf al ‘Adl continued to play an important operational role in the organization. Later that month, an

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309 Al-'Adl Letter. (English Translation) CTC
310 Ibid.
311 Ibid.
312 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Aviv Oreg. 20. Mar. 2014
operation targeting the Prince Sultan Air Base, south of Riyadh, home to 4,500 American military personnel was undertaken. Before 9/11, ‘Adl delegated two Saudi-born operatives the assignment and in December 2000 the Egyptian conducted a crash course in intelligence gathering and analysis in preparation for the daring operation. Originally, the operation aimed to target American Air Force planes with Stinger missiles. But to ‘Adl's chagrin, the Saudi operatives who also served in Bin Laden’s praetorian guard were taken into custody by coalition troops in Tora Bora. By the time the assignment was carried out, a thirteen-person cell attempted to shoot an American plane out of the sky using a surface to air missile, ‘Adl’s weapon of choice. But luckily for the American Air Force, the missile malfunctioned and never reached its intended target.

The failed operation as well as his choice of target manifested salient features of ‘Adl’s modus operandi. Since the battle of Jalalabad, ‘Adl’s expertise in the usage of surface to air missiles was instrumental in expanding Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities in its early years. As the previous chapter expounded, the expertise proved useful in training Somali militants in the early 1990s, precipitating the Black Hawk Down affair. The former commando’s penchant for aviation targets, dating back to his days in EIJ, would continue to influence Al Qaeda’s strategic calculus for the next decade. The commercial aviation industry became particularly appealing, because successful downing

of a commercial jet would undermine consumer confidence in the entire industry and exacerbate market volatility.

For the next seven or nine months there is little open source documentation on ‘Adl’s whereabouts and involvement in Al Qaeda. The next datable point is sometime at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003. Abu Bakr al Azidi, head of Al Qaeda’s network in Saudi Arabia, in communication with Sayf al ‘Adl and other operatives based in Iran, attempted to procure three Russian nuclear devices.\(^{316}\) Allegedly, ‘Adl told Abu Bakr to the effect “that no price was too high if they could get their hands on such weapons.”\(^{317}\) But the former commando warned his college of past “scams,” instructing him to ensure that Pakistani experts ensure the authenticity of the devices.\(^{318}\)

Sayf al ‘Adl’s brother-in-law Sharif al Masri, who receives virtually no attention in jihadist primary sources, was highly active in Al Qaeda’s CRBN program. Years later, Sharif al Masri told U.S. interrogators that Al Qaeda had a nuclear device positioned in Europe in 2004.\(^{319}\) Although the assertion was undoubtedly false, ‘Adl’s kinship and likely ties with Al Wafa, which has a long history of involvement in Al Qaeda’s CRBN program, only buttressed the former commando’s commitment to procuring a nuclear device.

At that juncture, preparations for the Riyadh Compound bombings were well on the way. Saudi Arabia was in Al Qaeda’s cross hairs, despite the ultimatum Gulf donors


\(^{318}\) Ibid.

\(^{319}\) JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment of Abu al-Libi
had made about cutting off aid if the of the Land of the Two Holy Places was targeted. Sayf al ‘Adl was designated leader of the Al Qaeda network in Saudi Arabia. His belongings, which included his personal diary, were dispatched to a safe house, intended as the command post. But ‘Adl never reached his intended destination.

There was considerable disagreement within Al Qaeda over the Riyadh Compound bombings. Members of the Riyadh cell argued that Al Qaeda’s Saudi network required time to consolidate its gains and lacked the infrastructure to survive a paralyzing retaliation by Saudi security services in the aftermath of the bombing. Based on documents taken from Bin Laden’s compound, Sayf al ‘Adl approved of the pending attack and used his stature within the organization to silence dissent. Yusuf al Ayiyri, a highly regarded ideologue and propagandist within AQAP, opposed the operation to the chagrin of Ayman al Zawahiri. According to an unnamed confidante of ideologue, Sayf al ‘Adl acting through “the Doctor” i.e. al Zawahiri decided to expel Yusuf al Ayiyri from AQAP’s senior leadership, presumably to ensure full control of the cell’s command structure. But there was little ‘Adl could do to end al Ayiyri’s involvement in the Riyadh cell, and the propagandist remained the leader of the operation on the ground. Granted, Bin Laden overruled al Ayiyri and gave Sayf al ‘Adl the go ahead for the bombing.

Despite Suleiman Abu Ghaith’s testimony to the FBI that ‘Adl, Abu Muhammad al Masri and Abu Khayr al Masri were incarcerated by Iranian intelligence on April 23,

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320 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Thomas Hegghammer. 4 Feb. 2014
322 SOCOM-2012-0000014-HT

323 Ibid.
324 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nawaf Obaid. 25 Apr. 2014
2003, ‘Adl was intimately involved in the orchestrating the deadly blasts.\textsuperscript{325} The operational planning had commenced years earlier in 2000 in conjunction with the 9/11 Hijackings. Al Qaeda sought to “drive a wedge between America and Saudi Arabia” through the devastating attacks.\textsuperscript{326} But it was only after 9/11 that Saudi authorities became aware of ‘Adl’s importance to the organization’s Riyadh cell as head of external operations with know-how second to none.

Saudi intelligence, with its own phone monitoring capabilities, became increasingly perplexed by long distance calls to the Kingdom from Northern Tehran bearing the area code of a Western European country in April 2002.\textsuperscript{327} Al Qaeda operatives based in Iran had ingeniously figured out how to use “roaming pay as you go cards,” that they had procured through third parties.\textsuperscript{328} At the time, only one cell phone provider provided such service: Swisscom AG, a major Swiss telecommunications corporation. Despite the ingenious method of communicating with operatives spanning three separate countries through an elaborate signal system, intelligence officials in Saudi Arabia and the United States were able to track Sayf al ‘Adl and other operatives in the Islamic Republic through their Swisscom phones.\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{325}Sulaiman Abu Ghayth’s statement to the FBI 3/6/2013
\textsuperscript{326}Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nawaf Obaid. 25 Apr. 2014
\textsuperscript{328}Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nawaf Obaid. 25 Apr. 2014
\textsuperscript{329}Select press accounts stipulated that ‘Adl made the phone call through a \textit{Thuriya} satellite phone, the Qatari brand favored by Al Qaeda. But it is unlikely that the then head of external operations would have risked operational security to use the satellite phone, given his treatise on secure communications.

While in custody in an Iranian intelligence complex in Tehran, Sayf al ‘Adl placed a phone call to Turki al-Dandani, directing him to commence a series of bombings in residential Riyadh. The Saudi security service as a Washington Post article put it, “obtained a trove of evidence – phones, computer, hard drives, documents and cash – that pointed back to Iran and Adel.”

The tactic of communicating with operatives on the ground through satellite phone was straight out of Bin Laden’s playbook, but clashed with Sayf al ‘Adl’s well articulated MO. In his treatise on Security and Communications, ‘Adl warned about the dangers of communicating through mobile phones, which are invariably under surveillance by enemy intelligence services. To make his point, ‘Adl referred to the Shin Bet’s penchant for eavesdropping on the mobile phones of Palestinian militants in “liquidating and assassinating” enemy operatives – possibly a veiled reference to the infamous assassination of the Engineer: Yahya Ayyash. As a result the paranoid operative advocated for passing messages via couriers or better yet diplomatic bags, given the protection their contents are afforded under international law.

In Al Amn wal Istikhbarat, Sayf al ‘Adl devoted several pages to the importance of using rudimentary code sequences to ensure operational security while transmitting messages through couriers. ‘Adl demonstrated how to utilize a series of grid-types to
code short messages. One nine by six grid named after Salah al Din, spelled with nine letters in Arabic, is featured prominently. When the numbered columns are arranged properly, the grid spells out a short message.\textsuperscript{335} Without knowledge of the correct sequence of numbered columns, there are greater than three hundred thousand possible combinations of letters, proving to be a simple but secure method of communicating.

Another model expounded upon in the treatise consisted of a five by eight grid with numbered columns and rows.\textsuperscript{336} The agreed upon sequence of numbers in the tens refers to a specific letter in the grid. The tens number refers to a column number and the ones number refers to a row number. For example, the number four-two refers to column four row two. The letters spell out a short message. Like the Salah al Din model, the grid-based code sequence is rather simple but difficult to decode, since there are over one hundred and twenty thousand possible combinations of letters.

Under Iranian imprisonment, Sayf al ‘Adl penned a series of articles and treatises for Saudi jihadist publications regarding his combat experience in Afghanistan and overarching modus operandi. Boredom under house arrest likely contributed to his newfound appreciation for writing. But his decision to disseminate operational expertise through jihadist publications and online forums was aligned with his baseline persona as a military trainer focused on buttressing Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities. As a trainer at the Jihad Wal training camp outside of Khost, ‘Adl implored Bin Laden in a “secret letter” to form a jihadist informational archive.\textsuperscript{337} In contrast to other camps including

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{336} See Appendix C
\item \textsuperscript{337} Al Shafey, Muhammad. “Sayf al ‘Adl yahuthu Bin Laden ala insha arshif malumati li ‘Al Qaeda’” Al Sharq Al Awsat. 10/14/2007
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Khalden and al Faruq, JihadWal, established during the struggle against Soviet forces, specialized in training commanders of Al Qaeda. The need for meticulous records on the organization’s standard operating procedure was needed during the early 1990s. Publishing reports and ensuring that they were appropriately cataloged on Jihadist online archives such Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi’s Minbar al Tawhid was an extension of ‘Adl’s commitment to train militants in intelligence gathering and counterintelligence.338 Despite the destruction of his Dawa apparatus and network of training camps, Sayf al ‘Adl used the world wide web to reinvent himself as a reputable military strategist whose expertise was instrumental in facilitating the resurgence of Al Qaeda.

With an astute sense of timing, Sayf al ‘Adl released his treatise: Al Qaeda’s Advice for Mujahideen in Iraq soon after a new Bin Laden recording surfaced in February 2003, a month prior to the American invasion of Iraq. In the recording, Bin Laden emphasized that Al Qaeda did not seek to bolster Saddam Hussein’s Baathist regime but to encourage the Ummah to defend Muslim lands against the crusader enemy. Al Qaeda’s political analysts followed deliberations in Washington D.C. closely, and early on, concluded that the American invasion of Iraq was a fait accompli, adroitly using the pending military confrontation as fodder for recruitment.339 Along the same lines as Bin Laden, Sayf al ‘Adl wrote his article as a means to assist the thousands of militants that would enter Iraq in droves. In prefacing the article, ‘Adl wrote:

This message, which was prepared in a hurry, aims at providing our people in the Arab region with a clear picture, from the [battle] field, of the reality of the American enemy and its fighting

http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10547&article=441216#.Uz175RZRE7c
338 See Appendix D
tactics, and we will use layman’s language and refrain from using military terminology.\textsuperscript{340}

Although the article provided what was by any account a revisionist history of Operation Enduring Freedom, the piece outlined his experiences facing American Special Forces in October and November 2001.

Although he did not play an operational role in Abu Musab al Zarqawi’s insurgency campaign against U.S. forces, Sayf al ‘Adl’s treatise on guerilla warfare shaped the calculus of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Drawing upon literature on insurgencies, ‘Adl advised militants in Iraq to “turn the mujahedin military force into small units,” because “large military units pose management problems” and are easily targeted by the American Air Force.\textsuperscript{341} To neutralize American air power, ‘Adl suggested that militants engage Coalition troops on their own terms by setting “trap area(s)” i.e. target unsuspecting troops and convoys using an improvised explosive devices (IEDs).\textsuperscript{342}

In August 2003, an Al Tawhid operation targeting the Canal Hotel in Baghdad was dedicated to Sayf al ‘Adl, referred to as \textit{amaliyat Sayf al ‘Adl} (operation Sayf al ‘Adl) in a “statement to the Ummah” published on Jihadist online forums.\textsuperscript{343} The deadly operation killed Brazilian UN diplomat Sergio Viera de Mello. Although, ‘Adl did not play a direct operational role in the bloody truck bombing, the attack was likely dedicated to the former commando out of solidarity with Al Qaeda operatives under Iranian incarceration.

‘Adl as well as Abu Muhammad al Masri and Suleiman Abu Ghaith were each

\textsuperscript{340} Intel Center’s Translation of \textit{Advice for Mujahidin in Iraq: Lessons Learned from Afghanistan}. http://www.intelcenter.com/Qaeda-Guerilla-Iraq-v1-0.pdf


\textsuperscript{342} Intel Center’s Translation of \textit{Advice for Mujahidin in Iraq: Lessons Learned from Afghanistan}. http://www.intelcenter.com/Qaeda-Guerilla-Iraq-v1-0.pdf

\textsuperscript{343} http://www.alsakher.com/showthread.php?t=78055
under solitary confinement for the first fifty days of their incarceration in a non descript Iranian intelligence building in Tehran.\textsuperscript{344} By the hundred and fiftieth day of their imprisonment, they were jailed together in one cell in the compound. Although under near prison conditions, Iranian intelligence treated them decently, never subjecting them to extensive interrogation. Despite some disagreement over how much access they had to the outside world, a plethora of circumstantial evidence suggests that ‘Adl had access to the web and was in communication with Al Qaeda Central.

By all accounts, Iran had its own “Gitmo problem.”\textsuperscript{345} Tehran was forced to find housing for hundreds of Al Qaeda operatives and their families that had taken refuge in Iran in the throes of Operation Enduring Freedom. Despite Suleiman Abu Ghaith’s Kuwaiti heritage and his detainment with Egyptian operatives, Iranian intelligence tended to keep operatives on the basis of their nationality. As a result, Anas al Libi who was detained with other Libyan operatives never saw ‘Adl or Muhammad al Masri.\textsuperscript{346} The American intelligence community had little knowledge of ‘Adl’s whereabouts. According to a top-secret memo that Edward Snowden released to the Washington Post, as far as the intelligence community knew, ‘Adl was last seen in prison in 2005.\textsuperscript{347}

Mustapha Hamid, who first sought asylum at the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, made his way to Iran as well. His first-wife Wafa, an educated woman who refused to live in Afghanistan under the Taliban’s rule, had lived in Tehran for years. Hamid joined Wafa and their adult sons: Abdul Rahman (b. 1979) and Abdullah (b. 1982), both of

\textsuperscript{344} Sulaiman Abu Ghayth’s statement to the FBI 3/6/2013
\textsuperscript{345} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Adam Goldman. 2/14/2014
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid.
whom were married to Iranian women. Life was tense under house arrest and Hamid’s family requested upwards of ten times for permission from the Iranian government to return to Egypt, but to no avail. However, their living conditions were substantially better than most because of Hamid’s close ties with the Taliban. Cognizant of the Taliban’s likely return to power, Iran kept Hamid under close surveillance but the prolific writer was not forced to live in prison-like conditions and blogged actively on Mafa Asia, while finishing up his twelve-volume series on Arab Afghans.

Sunni militants on jihadist forums were uneasy about Al Qaeda’s presence in ard al rafidin (territory of the rejectionists). Years later in an As-Sahab question and answer interview with Ayman al Zawahiri, where users of several jihadist forums submitted questions beforehand to the former head of EIJ, Zawahiri was inundated with questions regarding Al Qaeda’s activity in Iran. One person by the username Abu Abdul Razzaq asked incredulously,

How is it that Shaykh Sayf al-‘Adl lives in Iran, the country that kills our sons, rapes our women and, alters our religion and Quran, and yet they don’t harm him? And how could he live there without declaring Jihad against them? His presence there raises many questions and great bewilderment! I ask you to explain it to us, Our Beloved Shaykh!

A user claiming to be Sayf al ‘Adl al Madani, which may or not be ‘Adl and is virtually impossible to substantiate, instructed Zawahiri to elucidate the status of Al Qaeda operatives under house arrest. The user asked unequivocally:

After the latest discourse over Iran’s shameless stands, could you tell us about the condition of our

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349 Ibid.


brothers and shaykhs who are imprisoned by the Iranian regime.\footnote{Ibid.}

Given the sensitivity of Sunni Al Qaeda operatives based in Shia Iran, Zawahiri was forced to deliver a diplomatic if not opaque response. In regard to ‘Adl, Zawahiri bluntly said he was unwilling to comment.

In December 2004, Sayf al ‘Adl as well as Abu Muhammad al Masri, Abu Khayr al Masri and Suleiman Abu Ghaith were moved to another location, due to their wives’ incessant complaining.\footnote{Sulaiman Abu Ghayth’s statement to the FBI 3/6/2013 http://kronosadvisory.com/Kronos_US_v_Sulaiman_Abu_Ghayth_Statement.1.pdf} ‘Adl’s then twenty-seven year old wife and children joined him at the complex, a military staging ground of sorts outfitted with a modest living compound. According to Abu Ghaith’s testimony, the detainees and their families had individual apartments within the “100m by 100m compound” and had access to a mosque and soccer field.\footnote{Ibid.} They and their families remained in the compound for years, and were joined early on by members of the Bin Laden family including: Um Hamza, Hamza, Saad, and Uthman. Mandated with ensuring the Bin Laden family’s security, ‘Adl established a close operational rapport with Saad Bin Laden, at one point thought to be Bin Laden’s rightful successor.\footnote{Sandee, Ronald. NEFA Special Report: “Qaidat al-Jihad’s Near Future” (May 2011)} The eldest Bin Laden son was implicated in a litany of bombings in North Africa including: the Ghriba Synagogue bombing in Tunis (2002) and the Casablanca bombings (2003).\footnote{Joscelyn, Thomas. “Analysis: Al Qaeda’s interim emir and Iran” The Long War Journal 5/18/2011 http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/05/analysis_al_qaedas_i.php} Although it is unclear what operational role ‘Adl played in the deadly attacks, as head of external operations at the time he was likely kept informed on the operations beforehand.\footnote{Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Ronald Sandee. 31 Mar. 2014}
Sayf al ‘Adl’s incarceration and fallout with elements of Al Qaeda Central sidelined him from Al Qaeda’s resurgence, particularly the spectacular attacks that swept Western Europe: including the Madrid train bombings (2004) and the 7/7 bombings (2005). With the exception of the POC network he had established years earlier to recruit western Muslims to conduct operations against their home countries, ‘Adl’s operational role was nonexistent. However, articles he published in *Muaskar al Batar*, an increasingly influential Jihadist magazine that began in 2003, on conducting attacks on urban targets invariably influenced the calculus of the cells involved.358

Sayf al ‘Adl believed that operational planning must be “creative, flexible, and confidential.”359 Above all, “it should be simple. In other words every member (of the attack team) can easily understand it (the plan) to implement it without difficulty.”360 The assailants implicated in the deadly bombings effectively applied the lessons Sayf al ‘Adl and Abu Hajar Abdul Aziz al Muqrin imparted in successive articles in *Muaskar al Batar*. The 7/7 bombers chose “reasonable” sites to target that matched their capabilities. However, the operatives failed to heed ‘Adl’s advise regarding the cessation of electronic communication, as he learned from the failed EIJ assassination attempt in 1993.361

On a personal level, 2005 was a difficult year for Sayf al ‘Adl. According to Hassan Zeidan, ‘Adl’s father who was only informed of his son’s alleged death five years

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358 Scheuer, Michael. “Assessing London and Sharm al-Sheikh: The Role of Internet Intelligence and Urban Warfare Training” Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus Volume 2 Issue 15

359 Ibid.

360 Ibid.

361 Ibid.

earlier 2000, died from a blood clot.\textsuperscript{362} The Zeidan family blamed it on the psychological trauma of being informed of Muhammad’s death years earlier.\textsuperscript{363} Due to Egyptian inheritance laws, a local court was forced to issue a statement declaring Muhammad as deceased and as a result, had no right to inherit any of his father’s assets. In a May 2011 interview, Hassan Zeidan rejected evidence that Muhammad was Sayf al ‘Adl as libelous maintaining that Muhammad was deceased, despite the lack of a formal death certificate.

In May of that year, Sayf al ‘Adl along with his family were moved to an apartment complex in Tehran along with the other detainees and their families. The living arrangement was precipitously better than his previous one and ‘Adl has access to a mosque as well as a soccer field, for recreational exercise.\textsuperscript{364} Granted, their movements remained circumscribed and they were under constant surveillance. The former commando tended to maintain a trim physique through a workout regimen, likely took full advantage of the new amenities provided. In addition, ‘Adl’s father-in-law visited frequently, and was likely an invaluable source of outside information. There is some indication that Sayf al ‘Adl was in contact with his family back in Egypt. Until ‘Sharif al Masri was taken into custody by American intelligence in 2004, ‘Adl’s brother-in-law would have been a likely channel to the Zeidan family in Shabin el Kum. Years later in a blog post titled \textit{Ila ikhwani shabab misr al athimiya} (to my brothers the benevolent youth of Egypt) on Mafa Asia, Kalid bin Sayf al ‘Adl’s referenced his Egyptian paternal uncles,

\textsuperscript{362} “Al Masri Al Yawm fi munzil zaim al Qaeda” Youtube Video 5:29. Posted 5/22/2011 \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iL1ZdyH15Qc#t=17}
\textsuperscript{363} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{364} Sulaiman Abu Ghayth’s statement to the FBI 3/6/2013 \url{http://kronosadvisory.com/Kronos_US_v_Sulaiman_Abu_Ghayth_Statement.1.pdf}
possibly an attempt to reach out to his father’s family.\textsuperscript{365} Granted no conclusive evidence indicates with certainty that Sayf al `Adl was in communication with his family, and as Hassan Zeidan asserted in his interview with Egyptian press, communication might have ceased long before.

Al Qaeda’s resurgence in the mid 2000s brought with it new challenges to Al Qaeda Central. In the case of Iraq, Abu Musab al Zarqawi’s ruthless campaign against Iraqi Shiites proved to be a public relations quagmire for the organization. Attiyat Abdul Rahman, a close confidante of Bin Laden and someone who travelled back and forth between Waziristan and Iran, had the unenviable task of reigning in Zarqawi.\textsuperscript{366} In correspondence with Zarqawi, Attiya reminded the Jordanian that he “was a man of the public,” and should among other things, cease wanton killing of Shiites.\textsuperscript{367}

Zarqawi’s insatiable thirst for bloodshed was a strategic liability to Al Qaeda Central. Despite public statements to the contrary, Al Qaeda Central did not bat an eyelash when Zarqawi was killed by an American aerial bombardment in June 2006. An unconfirmed Saudi report suggested that Sayf al ‘Adl through the Quds Force willfully tipped off the U.S. Intelligence regarding the coordinates of Zarqawi’s safe house.\textsuperscript{368}

According to the account, an anonymous western intelligence source who worked extensively in Iraq, asserted that a coterie of Egyptian operatives including ‘Adl, with the

\begin{footnotesize}
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The usage of the term “ahmami” rather than “ahmamtaini” or “amati” suggests that Khalid has three or more paternal uncles.
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\end{footnotesize}
blessing of the IRGC, colluded to eliminate the Jordanian-born operative. The former commando arranged a meeting between Zarqawi and Qassem Suleimani on July 5, 2006 in the Kurdish village of Marivan, along the Iranian border. The meeting culminated in a phone call placed by ‘Adl from Tehran to Zarqawi’s thuriyah satellite phone the following day. Naturally, the U.S. Intelligence community traced the phone call, allowing for the coordinates of the compound to be passed on to the Air Force. Assuming the report is accurate, Zarqawi’s extra judicial killing represented a rare instance of collusion between Al Qaeda Central, Tehran, and Washington. As it were, Zarqawi’s refusal to reign in the violence forced ‘Adl’s hand and ensured the Jordanian operative’s demise.

Reports of Sayf al ‘Adl’s betrayal of Abu Musab al Zarqawi are even more bizarre in light of ‘Adl’s posthumous biography of his brother in arms, posted on select jihadist forums including Minbar al Tawhid. The monotony of life under house arrest coerced Sayf al ‘Adl to write, regardless of his lack of affinity for the exercise. He wrote:

> I have never been a hobbyist of reading or writing, nor have I been a fan of rhetoric. However, due to the circumstances that I am experiencing nowadays, I found myself having plenty of free time which I spent in performing invocation, reciting the Koran, and doing some physical exercises. In this daily routine of mine, I received your request to write about my experience with the dear brother, Abu Mus'ab (Ahmad Fadil).

Despite Suleiman Abu Ghaith’s testimony to the FBI that he and his colleagues were forbidden contact with the outside world, ‘Adl evidently had internet access was able to respond to requests by the Global Islamic Media Front for an exclusive expose on the life of Zarqawi.

The posthumous biography offered a revisionist account of Zarqawi’s contributions to protect the Ummah against the crusaders. Just as ‘Adl gleaned from the

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369 Ibid.
370 [http://www.tawhed.ws/?i=ttfoom6f](http://www.tawhed.ws/?i=ttfoom6f)
fiasco of al qadiya al raqm 401, Zarqawi realized that “the survival of the regional order was linked to the survival of the state of Israel” and in extension, the United States. 372 As a result, the veteran of the Afghan jihad set his sights on the far enemy.

For the next half a decade, Sayf al ‘Adl fell off the map, reducing the number of essays and blog posts published online. With the exception of terror threats made by a user claiming to be Sayf al ‘Adl, the former Egyptian commando who had long been replaced as the third highest ranking member of Al Qaeda played a negligible operational role. Italian media outlets reported that a user purporting to be Sayf al ‘Adl warned of a pending terrorist attack “in the land of the Romans.” 373 The user prefaced his post by debunking rumors that Bin Laden had died. He categorized reports that “Shaykh Usama Bin-Laden died in the Pakistan earthquake, has been arrested, or is sick” as “fruit of a media war.” 374 He went on to say that jihadists had successfully smuggled in ground-to-air missiles into “the land of the Romans” i.e. Italy, a claim that was left uncorroborated. 375

Nonetheless, over the next year one event caught Sayf al ‘Adl’s eye: democratic reform in Palestine and particularly Hamas’ decision to embrace the ballot box in 2006 as a means of promoting its interests. ‘Adl posted an essay on the Global Islamic Media Front titled Ya Sasat Hamas, Taalu ila kalimat suwa (Oh leaders of Hamas, coming to a like term), railing on democratic governances and the “ignorance” of the Hamas political

bureau. He decried Hamas’s willingness to enter the “path of demokratia and its expectorations,” despite ignorance of the term’s distinct connotations. Sayf al ‘Adl pontificated on the definition of the term the Greek term demokratia, defining it through procedural reduction. He defined demos as al shaab (the people) and kratos as the al sultah (the Government), reducing governance to “parliamentary councils,” at odds with the wishes of the believers. In conclusion, Sayf al ‘Adl articulated his hope that the Hamas political leadership make “the right decision” and move close to the Palestinian people.

The bizarre post marked an important transition in Sayf al ‘Adl’s online activity. During the immediate years after Operation Enduring Freedom, ‘Adl focused on buttressing Al Qaeda’s operational capabilities through treatises on military tactics, intelligence gathering, and counterintelligence. But as the Egyptian operative became operationally irrelevant during the mid 2000s, Sayf al ‘Adl turned his attention toward political events shaping the Arab World. His essay on Hamas’ political maneuverings at the time served as a precursor for an essay campaign during February and March of 2011, regarding the Arab Spring.

Little is known about Sayf al ‘Adl’s activity between 2007-2010. Throughout 2010, a series of seemingly credible reports surfaced, obfuscating ‘Adl’s whereabouts and operational role within the organization. For a short time period, an internal CIA memo circulated stipulating that Sayf al ‘Adl was on the verge of traveling to Damascus,
Syria. Of course, the report proved unfounded. In October 2010, Der Spiegel based on the testimony of Noman Benotman, a former Libyan jihadist and acquaintance of Sayf al ‘Adl, reported that the Egyptian operative was released under a Haqqani negotiated prisoner swap, a story that engendered a great deal of chatter on jihadist forums. According to the narrative, militants kidnapped Heshmatolla Attarzadeh, an Iranian diplomat based at the consulate in Peshawar. Using the strategic triangle, a series of interlocking channels between the Haqqani network, Al Qaeda, and Tehran, the arm of the ISI secured the release of the Iranian diplomat in return for Sayf al ‘Adl.

The subject was of Al Qaeda personnel including members of the Bin Laden family under house arrest in Iran was brought up throughout the Abbottabad documents taken into custody by Navy Seal Team Six. In one letter, Attiya who demonstrated a degree of pragmatism in his treatise on Hezbollah, bemoaned the Tehran’s lack of good faith in negotiations. He wrote, “the criminals” in Tehran refrain from “show(ing) that they are negotiating with us or reacting to our pressure, they just do these acts to appear as if it is one-sided and as a matter of initiative on their behalf.” Furthermore, some within the jihadist community viewed the “Rafidah” (the Shia rejectionists) as a greater
threat than the U.S., a sentiment Attiya (at least privately) rejected. Despite Bin Laden’s paranoia and suspicion of Iranian duplicity, Al Qaeda Central displayed a willingness to reach quid pro quo arrangements with Tehran when their interests converged. Typically, when Al Qaeda operatives were released from Iran, they travelled back to Waziristan, the organization’s corporate headquarters.

The Der Speigel account made waves within the Jihadist community. Abu Jandal, who had long been released by the Yemeni security service and became a cab driver in Saana, said on a United Arab Emirate program assuming ‘Adl had returned to Afghanistan, he expected “something to happen in the next couple years.” When asked about ‘Adl’s whereabouts, Abu Jandal responded ominously, “people like Sayf al-Adl do not leave Afghanistan,” where he was presumably orchestrating large scale attacks as Bin Laden’s newly declared head of external operations. ‘Adl’s alleged release was declared “Al-Qaeda’s biggest break in a decade” due to the Egyptian operative’s second to none operational expertise.

But the report proved inaccurate, and overwhelming circumstantial evidence suggests that Sayf al ‘Adl remains in Iran with his children. In a media conference, Deputy Director of National Intelligence Robert Cardillo said he was “confident that Saif

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385 Ibid.
386 MEMRITV Videos. “Former Bin Laden Bodyguard: I Expect New Attacks against the US” Youtube 1:56
Posted on 7/30/2012
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-CfYmRzdKk
387 Ibid.
389 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Seth Jones. 7 Nov. 2013.
al-Adel (was), despite all the rumors of being back in Pakistan enjoying Iranian hospitality.”

According to Suleiman Abu Ghaith, the IRGC gave Sayf al ‘Adl and Abu Muhamad al Masri a chance to leave, as long as they did not return to Afghanistan, but the Egyptians opted to stay. As the years passed, Tehran no longer saw the Al Qaeda operatives under house arrest as valuable bargaining chips. In short, the considerable resources expended to maintain the status quo outweighed any potential leverage they provided in negotiations with the U.S. But the operatives had nowhere else to go and were persona non grata in Egypt. In Sayf al ‘Adl’s case, the former commando had no family back home to return to, which presumably influenced his decision to remain in Tehran to the chagrin of his wife and five kids.

By the beginning of 2011, Sayf al ‘Adl had regular access to Al Jazeera and other satellite channels. Adopting the username Abir Sabil (passer-by), possibly a veiled reference to the Kuwaiti poet Abirat Sabil, Sayf al ‘Adl and Mustapha Hamid engaged in an online dialogue regarding the events sweeping the region and the relevance of Al Qaeda going forward. Hamid acknowledged early on, that the name Abir Sabil was nothing more than the new kunya of a long standing operative. In an introduction to the five essays, Mustapha Hamid provided a brief biographical sketch of Abir Sabil on Mafa Asia, matching that of his son-in-law.

392 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Adam Goldman. 14 Feb. 2014
394
“Abir Sabil” is an old member of the Al Qaeda organization. He joined the organization in late 1989, while the Soviets left Afghanistan and the infamous battle of Jalalabad entered the stage of sluggish attrition. Not among the founders of the organization but he is considered the most important of the operational leaders in areas of training and the management of (training) camps, security, and military operations in general. In 1995, he undertook a prominent role in Somalia. There he commanded the training of Somali groups, and worked to set in motion their operations in the field. He had a prominent role also in the last battle of Qandahar in 2001 against advancing forces with support from the American army and air force (TN: reference to Northern Alliance forces with clandestine American support as well as air cover). After the martyrdom of everyone from Abu Ubaida al Banshiri (1996) then Abu Hafs al Masri (2001), who founded the organization of Al Qaeda with Usama bin Laden, “Abir Sabil” became the most senior and important of persons, the highest operational ranking class in that organization.395 If any doubt remained that “Abir Sabil” and Sayf al ‘Adl were the same person, the last sentence referring to ‘Adl’s succession as head of the military committee after the death of Muhammad Atef clarified any ambiguity that was left.

The five letters were published between January 12-March 9. The first two letters addressed Al Qaeda’s success and failures over the last decade, ostensibly a response to Mustapha Hamid’s assertion that the organization should be disbanded, as well as the semantics of the term irhab (terrorist).396 The last three dealt with the events sweeping the region. Sayf al ‘Adl devoted a letter to Egypt, Yemen and Libya, providing his insight on the fall of the Mubarak regime and the unrest engulfing Libya and Yemen. To men like Hamid and ‘Adl, the “populous Arab revolutions” sweeping the region represented “Jihad in the contemporary age,” and were understood in post colonial terms.397

Always a controversial figure within the Jihadist community due to his

395 Ibid.
The author translated the passage then made some revisions based on Vahid Brown’s translation posted on Jihadica.com The translated passage is a hybrid of the author’s original translation as well as Vahid Brown’s.


outspokenness and penchant for challenging the status quo, Mustapha Hamid garnered the ire of many jihadists by the turn of the last decade. The first Afghan Arab grew disenchanted with Al Qaeda since the 9/11 hijackings. Hamid was quick to point out that events “took an opposite turn compared to what Bin Laden had imagined. Instead of buckling under his three painful blows (referring to the three planes that were flown into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon), American retaliated and destroyed both the Taliban and Al Qaeda.”

He was especially critical of Bin Laden’s refusal to accept internal dissent within the organization’s ranks. In the following years, Mustapha Hamid went even further. In a blog post from December 2010, the former Qandahar bureau chief for Al Jazeera, argued that Al Qaeda should be disbanded due to Bin Laden’s gross mismanagement. Not only did Al Qaeda fail to bring the United States to its knees with the 9/11 hijackings, but Washington benefited from the attack. He wrote: “the benefits the enemy derived from (the decisions made by) Al-Qaeda are great by any measure, to the extent that (Al-Qaeda) can be considered one of the major tools (the enemy used to advance) its international strategy.” Furthermore, the stunning attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon allowed Washington to rally other western nations in the support of their cause.

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399 Ibid.


401 Ibid.
and invade the *Ummah*.\(^{402}\) Mustapha Hamid’s assertion that Al Qaeda was no longer relevant and should be disbanded rendered him a persona non grata in select corners of the online jihadist community. The Ansar Al Mujahideen Arabic language forum barred Hamid’s account from the website.\(^{403}\) Administrators of the prominent jihadist forum wrote to the first Arab Afghan, “you have been suspended from the website for the following reasons: there is no room for the tails (i.e. lackeys) of the Rafidite Zoroastrians (derogatory terms for Shi’ite Iranians) on an Islamic jihadi website.”\(^{404}\)

On January 8, Sayf al ‘Adl responded respectfully in a post titled: *lasna…ala ruqah al shutnraj wa lasna ahjar* (we are not…on a chess board and we are not stones).\(^{405}\) Before articulating areas of disagreement, the former commando was careful to pay homage to his father-in-law, labeling Mustapha Hamid “the most prominent” jihadist author.\(^{406}\) ‘Adl maintained that even westerners consulted Hamid’s books, in recognition of the first Afghan Arab’s thoughtful prose and commitment to narrating the events that unfolded the way he saw them.

Sayf al ‘Adl addressed his critique to “(his) beloved Sheikh” i.e. Hamid, but proceeded to articulate a divergence of opinion.\(^{407}\) He admitted that Al Qaeda made mistakes but assured his father-in-law that “their intentions (were) pure,” and that “flogging” themselves over the errors committed was excessive.\(^{408}\) ‘Adl maintained that

\(^{402}\) Ibid.
\(^{403}\) Ibid.
\(^{404}\) Ibid.
\(^{406}\) Ibid.
\(^{407}\) Ibid.
\(^{408}\) Green, R. “Online Exchange between Mustapha Hamid and Saif Al-‘Adl Represents New Wave of Internal Jihadi Criticism” MEMRI 7/14/2011 <http://www.memrijttm.org/content/en/report.htm?report=5468>
by and large, Al Qaeda scored major victories over the preceding decade. They stymied Washington’s aspiration for a “Greater Middle East,” proving that western involvement in the region was tantamount to a “new imperialism.”\textsuperscript{409} The costly wars the West embroiled itself in engendered an economic crisis. By undermining the far enemy’s geopolitical interests, Arab regimes faltered allowing populous revolutions to sweep the region.

In ‘Adl’s mind, the successes were engendered by Al Qaeda’s declaration of war on the United States (1996). He asked rhetorically:

How would it have been possible to achieve all this without the (1998) bombing of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar Al Salam, which symbolized an attack on American foreign policy, which is entirely disposed in favor of the \textit{Ummah}’s enemies? Wasn’t America’s military collapse heralded in the attack on (the U.S.S. Cole)?\textsuperscript{410} Incredibly, ‘Adl maintained that the 9/11 hijackings would be studied at “military academies alongside” \textit{The Art of War} and the \textit{Iliad}.\textsuperscript{411}

The former commando viewed America’s War on Terror as an all out offensive on the \textit{Ummah}, rather than a struggle against a small sect of religious extremists. In his next blog post two months later, Sayf al ‘Adl astutely discussed the semantics of the term \textit{irhab}, appealing to millions of Muslims not just jihadists by tapping into growing frustration throughout the Islamic World.\textsuperscript{412} He incredulously asked, “Is a terrorist (someone who) recites prayer at mosque and studies a book of Sunni jurisprudence?”\textsuperscript{413} “Is a terrorist (someone who) is invited to return to the \textit{Ummah} and its religion and comes

\footnotesize{409} Ibid.  
\footnotesize{410} Ibid.  
\footnotesize{411} Ibid.  
\footnotesize{413} Ibid.
close to God, glory be upon him?"414

Despite their disagreements, Sayf al ‘Adl and Mustapha Hamid shared an Islamist anti-imperialist outlook, obsessed with the subjugation of Ummah by the unipolar world order.415 They represented a pragmatic wing of Al Qaeda that yearned for the organization to act coherently with well-articulated objectives aligned with their mutual emphasis on post colonialism.416 In contrast to Bin Laden, they both “believed there should be a premium on military discipline” and “(operational) hierarchies” to ensure Al Qaeda’s relevance in the coming years.417 Overplaying its hand and trying to pull off another spectacular attack on the U.S., would set back the organization even further. Despite Sayf al ‘Adl’s rhetoric regarding the 9/11 hijackings, both ‘Adl and Hamid vehemently opposed spectacular attacks on the U.S. homeland, instigating an overwhelming military response.

Shortly after Bin Laden’s death in May 2011, Sayf al ‘Adl was named interim leader of Al Qaeda, according to Noman Benotman who was allegedly told by jihadists in Pakistan.418 Presumably, he was chosen to lead the organization until the majlis al shura voted Ayman al Zawahiri as Bin Laden’s successor, dictated by Al Qaeda’s bylaws. But as Yassir al Siri was quick to point out, Al Qaeda never issued an “official statement” declaring ‘Adl as Bin Laden’s successor, so it is difficult to corroborate Benotman’s

414 Ibid.
416 Ibid.
417 Ibid.
http://www.aawsat.net/2011/05/article55246466
Regardless, the former commando’s position as caretaker was short-lived, and al Zawahiri was named the head of Al Qaeda within weeks.

Granted it is difficult to ascertain the inner workings of Al Qaeda Central, some evidence suggests that there was a succession crisis of sorts. Sayf al ‘Adl had differences with the Ayman al Zawahiri over the direction of Al Qaeda. Sayf al ‘Adl approached violence as “a military professional” and viewed operations as a means of pursuing limited objectives to undermine Washington’s geopolitical interests just as the early adherents of Islam had done vis a vis the Quraysh. In contrast, al Zawahiri adopted Bin Laden’s “targeted opportunity approach,” which usually entailed operations carried out on a whim, rather than meticulously planned over a long period of time. Sayf al ‘Adl abhorred whimsical decision making couched in empty Salafist rhetoric. As a result, the former head of the military committee distanced himself from Al Qaeda Central as well as the organization’s external operations.

Sometime during the summer of 2011, a Facebook campaign petitioning for Mustapha Hamid’s freedom was launched, engendering chatter on jihadist forums. In August of that year, Mustapha Hamid along with his family was released by Iranian authorities and repatriated via the Egyptian embassy in Tehran after a twenty-one day ordeal. For at least a short period of time, the Morsi Government proved amenable, allowing Hamid to live openly in Alexandria. Two years later, Asma escaped the

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419 Al Shafey, Muhammad. “Jadil had bayn al Islamieen hawl anba taayin Sayf al ‘Adl khalfan libin Laden” Al Sharq Al Aswsat. 5/18/2011
422 Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Adam Goldman. 14 Feb. 2014.
423 Farrall, Leah. “Mustafa Hamid (Abu Walid al Masri)” (The blog formerly know as) All Things Counter Terrorism. 8/11/2011
complex Sayf al ‘Adl and their five children were held in, and is now living in a compound in Qatar alongside members of the Bin Laden family.\textsuperscript{425} She is actively negotiating the release of her five children, but select foreign governments have been hesitant to acquiesce due to the identity of her husband.\textsuperscript{426}

After years of imprisonment, Sayf al ‘Adl is “a broken man” and likely does not pose a direct threat to the U.S. or its allies.\textsuperscript{427} However, ‘Adl’s operational expertise preserved in numerous essays and manuals cataloged on jihadist online archives ensure his position of influence.\textsuperscript{428} His operational career may have ended but through the World Wide Web, ‘Adl remains Al Qaeda’s greatest military trainer, and as a result, poses a grave albeit indirect threat. In recent years, a militant group in the Qalamoun mountains of Syria: \textit{Katibat Sayf al ‘Adl} (Unit Sayf al ‘Adl) has emerged.\textsuperscript{429} Like its namesake, the militant group conducts “qualitative,” low risk operations against the Assad regime and Iranian forces, actively recording their feats on social media. In short, Sayf al ‘Adl’s will to carry on the fight may have diminished but his lore within the jihadist community remains resolute.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{425} Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Ronald Sandee. 31 Mar. 2014
Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nawaf Obaid. 25 Apr. 2014
\textsuperscript{426} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{427} Sulaiman Abu Ghayth’s statement to the FBI 3/6/2013
\textsuperscript{428} See: \url{http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=nkpabwye}
\textsuperscript{429} See: Appendix E
\end{footnotesize}


**Conclusion**

Although Sayf al ‘Adl is not an adroit ideologue nor particularly charismatic, no one has contributed more to Al Qaeda’s standard operating procedure. He served a plethora of roles in the organization from military trainer to head of external operations. ‘Adl’s pragmatic outlook and professionalism helped Al Qaeda transition from a database of Arab volunteers in Peshawar to a globally feared terrorist organization, with impressive intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities. His emphasis on simple operations instead of spectacular ones like 9/11 drew the ire of Usama bin Laden and Khaled Sheikh Muhammad. But without ‘Adl’s expertise in intelligence collection and precautions to ensure operational security, Al Qaeda’s spectacular attacks on the U.S. homeland would have been beyond the organization’s capabilities.

Over the last decade, Sayf al ‘Adl’s operational role in Al Qaeda diminished precipitously due to his incarceration in Tehran and fallout with the organization’s senior leadership. But with an uncanny ability to adapt to changing circumstances, his influence within the jihadist community has if anything increased. Through the World Wide Web, Sayf al ‘Adl transformed himself into a reputable military strategist, whose treatises and manuals are accessible through jihadist online archives, allowing him to pose a threat to U.S. interests long after he dies.
Appendix A

The following is the FBI’s profile on Sayf al ‘Adl. It can be found at: http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/saif-al-adel/view

**SAIF AL-ADEL**

**Aliases:**
Muhamad Ibrahim Makkawi, Seif Al Adel, Ibrahim Al-Madani

**DESCRIPTION**

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Hair:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>April 11, 1963;</td>
<td>Dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 11, 1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Birth:</th>
<th>Eyes:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Dark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Complexion:</th>
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<td>Olive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight:</th>
<th>Sex:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Citizenship:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Language:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None known</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remarks:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Adel is thought to be affiliated with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), and is believed to be a high-ranking member of the Al-Qaeda organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CAUTION**

Saif Al-Adel is wanted in connection with the August 7, 1998, bombings of the United States Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya.

**REWARD**

The Rewards For Justice Program, United States Department of State, is offering a reward of up to $5 million for information leading directly to the apprehension or conviction of Saif Al-Adel.

**SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND DANGEROUS**

If you have any information concerning this person, please contact your local FBI office or the nearest American Embassy or Consulate.
Below is the United Kingdom’s Al Qaeda sanctions list entry for Sayf al ‘Adl. Note the content of the sanctions list has not been doctored only the format. The original can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271230/al_qaida.pdf

CONSOLIDATED LIST OF FINANCIAL SANCTIONS TARGETS IN THE UK

Last Updated: 14/01/2014

Status: Asset Freeze Targets

REGIME: Al-Qaida

INDIVIDUALS

19. Name: SAYF AL 2: n/a 3: n/a 4: n/a 5: n/a.
Below is the United Nation’s Al Qaeda sanctions list entry for Sayf al ‘Adl. Note the content of the sanctions list has not been doctored only the format. The original can be found at:
http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11077.doc.htm
The following is the National Counterterrorism Center’s 2014 Calendar profile of Sayf al ‘Adl. The original can be found at:
Below is the Department of Justice’s profile on Sayf al ‘Adl. It can be found at: 
http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/index.cfm?page=adel&language=english
Below are photos of Muhammad Ibrahim Makkawi provided in the YouTube Video
*Sheikh Abu Hamza – Interview Before Losing his Hands*
Below are known photos of Sayf al ‘Adl provided by NEFA.
Appendix B

Below is the cover page of *Mu’askar al Batar* issue twenty-six. Sayf al ‘Adl published an article in the edition.
Below is the cover page of the fifth edition of Mu’askar al Batar titled “Forces of the Mountain. Security and Communications.” Sayf al ‘Adl wrote an influential essay in the issue.
An anthology of essays by Sayf al ‘Adl published by the Al Qaeda forum Ansar al Muhajirun.
The following is a brief chart ‘Adl provided in his article on *Security and Communications* to demonstrate how governments utilize metadata from phone calls to understanding terror networks.

<table>
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<th>Price</th>
<th>Number of Seconds</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Telephone Number to</th>
<th>Telephone Number from</th>
<th>Phone Call</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>12</td>
<td>8:06</td>
<td>Jeddah</td>
<td>7065432</td>
<td>7009894</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

The following is a model of the Salah al Din grid used to code messages.

When spelled out the grid reads in Arabic: “wait our instructions are Friday the fifth of September”
The following is another grid template for coding messages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>ج</td>
<td>ح</td>
<td>ب</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ه</td>
<td>أ</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ر</td>
<td>ض</td>
<td>ذ</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ن</td>
<td>م</td>
<td>ل</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>ي</td>
<td>ط</td>
<td>غ</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>د</td>
<td>ت</td>
<td>س</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ع</td>
<td>خ</td>
<td>ظ</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

الرسالة
انتبه أمامك عدو التشغيل
.21 36 47 15 34 22 34 22 31 11 42 44 22
This is the template used for writing up reports.
Appendix D

The following is an archive of Sayf al ‘Adl’s articles. It can be found at: http://www.tawhed.ws/a/?a=nkpabwye

First Column: “Essays and letters”
Second Column: “Downloads”
Third Column: “Reads”
A user on a jihadist forum posted the following list of Sayf al-‘Adl’s publications as well as corresponding urls.
Appendix E

Below is the Katibat Sayf al ‘Adl Facebook page. It can be found at: https://ar-ar.facebook.com/aladelBattalion

A recent recording of an operation in Qalamoun can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPuZwZxW30bk
Below is a post regarding a katibat Sayf al ‘Adl operation against regime forces in a Damascus suburb on April 6, 2014.
Bibliography

I consulted an array of sources including: books, newspaper articles, government documents, experts on Al Qaeda, blogs, YouTube videos, jihadist web sites, FBIS translations, as well as primary sources released by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Alas, I tried to make the reference list as accessible yet comprehensive as possible.

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Lahoud, Nelly. “Beware of Imitators: Al-Qa’ida through the Lens of its Confidential Secretary” CTC 6/4/2012


The Pearl Project. “The Truth Left Behind: Inside the Kidnapping and Murder of Daniel Pearl” Georgetown University. (August 2007)


Tawil, Camille. “The Other Face of Al Qaeda” Qulliam Foundation. 11/17/2010


Watts, Clint. “Al Qaeda’s misadventures in the Horn of Africa.” CTC Harmony Project. 7/2/2007


Newspaper Articles / Journal Articles / Blog Posts


Al Shafey, Muhammad. “Atiqal rajul imarati min qudami al Afghan al Arab fi Saudia” Al Sharq Al Awsat 12/7/2003

Al Shafey, Muhammad. “Jadil had bayn al Islamieen hawl anba taayin Sayf al ‘Adl khalfan libin Laden” Al Sharq Al Awsat. 5/18/2011


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Farrall, Leah. “Mustafa Hamid (Abu Walid al Masri)” (The blog formerly know as) All Things Counter Terrorism. 8/11/2011


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Musharbash, Yassin. "Saif Al-Adel Back in Waziristan: A Top Terrorist Returns to Al-


Roggio, Bill. “Yemeni airstrikes garget top al Qaeda leaders” Long War Journal 12/24/2009


Sandee, Ronald. NEFA Special Report: “Qaidat al-Jihad’s Near Future” (May 2011)


Scheuer, Michael. “Assessing London and Sharm al-Sheikh: The Role of Internet Intelligence and Urban Warfare Training” Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus Volume 2 Issue 15


Federal Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Translations

FBIS GMP20030508000135
FBIS EUP20020218000278
FBIS GMP20040402000070
FBIS GMP20031029000060
FBIS GMP20021110000128
FBIS GMP20040716000196
FBIS EUP20030905000135

Documents released by the Combatting Terrorism Center (CTC)

Note that the CTC provided identification numbers to some but not all of the documents.

AFGP-2002-000078
AFGP-2002-600053
AFGP-2002-600113
AFGP-2002-600104
AFGP-2002-800775
SOCOM-2012-0000014-HT
SOCOM-2012-0000012-HT
Al-‘Adl Letter. (English Translation) CTC
‘Atiyah’s Letter to Zarqawi (English Translation)
Hamid, Mustafa. “Chatting on Top of the World. The Biggest Stupidity” (English Translation)

Government Documents

U.S. government documents illegally published by Wikileaks were consulted. The author does not condone the organization’s behavior.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13224 - BLOCKING PROPERTY AND PROHIBITING
TRANSACTIONS WITH PERSONS WHO COMMIT, THREATEN TO COMMIT, OR SUPPORT TERRORISM

JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment of Abdallah Aiza al Matrafi

JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment of Abdul Bin Mohammed Abis Ourgy

JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment of Adil Hadi al-Jaza’iri Bin Hamilili

JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed

JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment of Muhammad Binyam

Sulaiman Abu Ghayth’s statement to the FBI 3/6/2013

SUMMERY OF EVIDENCE FOR COMBATANT STATUS REVIEW TRIBUNAL – AL-SHIBH, RAMZI BIN

**Jihadist online threads**

Note that screen shots were taken of urls that contained Arabic.

http://www.alsakher.com/showthread.php?t=78055

http://www.ansarsunna.com/vb/showthread.php?t=34314

http://www.liberalls.org/vb/showthread.php?t=23885

http://www.muslm.org/vb/showthread.php?437034-


al ‘Adl, Sayf. Security and Intelligence. (May 2011)


Al-Qa’ida Commander Writes Al-Zarqawi ‘Jihadist Biography’ Translated by Bryn Mwar University

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Harun, Fadil. The War Against Islam.

IntelCenter: Know Thy Enemy Terrorism DVD Series: al-Qaeda V070: Osama bin Laden Tarnak Farms Address and Last Wills of 9-11 Hijackers Ziad Jarrah and Mohammed Atta. 3:35

Intel Center’s Translation of *Advice for Mujahidin in Iraq: Lessons Learned from Afghanistan.*


**Interviews**

Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Seth Jones. 7 Nov. 2013.

Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Bruce Hoffman. 27 Nov. 2013.


Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Thomas Hegghammer. 3 Feb. 2014


Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Vahid Brown. 18 Feb. 2014

Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nelly Lahoud. 12 Mar. 2014

Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Rohan Gunaratna. 18 Mar. 2014

Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Aviv Oreg. 20 Mar. 2014

Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Ronald Sandee. 31 Mar. 2014

Weisfuse, Ari. Interview with Nawaf Obaid. 25 Apr. 2014