

Flashback: How MI6, the CIA and The Saudis Launched Jihad

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Visas for Al Qaeda—the CIA Handouts That Rocked the World

by J. Michael Springmann

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Dec. 29—J. Michael Springmann has a sordid tale to tell. As an entry-level American diplomat in the late 1980s, his first overseas assignment was in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where he was a consular officer responsible for approving visas for non-immigrant visitors to the United States. In the course of his two-year assignment in Jeddah, he witnessed the flow of terrorists from all over the world into the United States, under a CIA program that he dubbed “Visas for Terrorists.”

When Springmann attempted to do his job—which was to screen applicants and reject those who did not meet the strict criteria spelled out in State Department guidelines and Federal laws—he found himself up against a majority of his colleagues in Jeddah, at the embassy in Riyadh, and back home at Foggy Bottom and CIA headquarters in Langley. His decisions to block visa applications for a small army of suspect characters with no apparent reason for traveling to the United States, and with no ties to Saudi Arabia or to their home countries, were routinely reversed by higher-ups in Jeddah.

He spent 1987-1989 in Jeddah, and was later assigned to Stuttgart, Germany, New Delhi, India, and

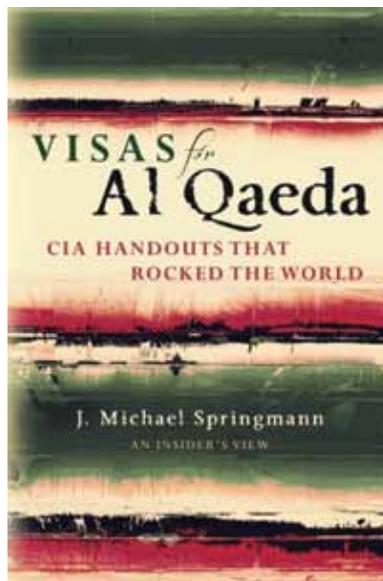
eventually to a cubby-hole desk at the State Department’s in-house intelligence agency, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR). In 1991, with no explanation, he was terminated. He later found out that his supervisor in Jeddah, Jay Freres, had filled his personnel file with scurrilous, but vaguely worded complaints, which he never was able to see, even after he was dumped in late 1991 and spent the next decade battling through appeals, Freedom of Information Act suits, and efforts to alert Congressional oversight committees and major media outlets.

His personal account offers a small window into a very big national security scandal. In effect, successive U.S. administrations, beginning in 1979, recruited, trained, and deployed thousands of what Springmann called the Arab-Afghan Legion. When the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan, after more than a decade of warfare against the Arab-Afghan Legion, the program continued, unabated. When the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact collapsed, the program continued, unabated. The same terrorists who had been deployed against

the Red Army were the shock-troops for British-American-Saudi regime-change projects, starting in the Balkans, and moving on to Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

Jeddah

During the more than two years that Springmann served in Jeddah, the consulate issued 45,000 visas per year. He personally processed 100 visa applications per day. Soon after his arrival in Jeddah, Springmann dis-



Springmann's personal account, published in 2014.

covered that, of the 20 diplomatic personnel assigned to the Consulate, he and two others were the only legitimate Foreign Service Officers. The rest were either CIA or National Security Agency personnel, operating under State Department cover. For the most part, they were recruiters and facilitators of the flow of terrorists, criminals, and would-be jihadists through various circuitous routes into Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Springmann's first career-ending mistake took place during a visit of Joseph P. O'Neill, who led an inspection team from the State Department's watchdog Inspection Corps. Under questioning from O'Neill, Springmann revealed that he had rejected visa applications made by scores of suspect individuals, only to have his decisions reversed and the questionable visas issued. Springmann told O'Neill that he had retained a file of all of the rejected visa applications, with background data on why he had rejected the applications. Mysteriously, soon after his meeting with O'Neill, Springmann's list was shredded, and all records of the Arab-Afghan visa cases disappeared.

Through contacts with other State Department personnel, DIA officers, and others, Springmann learned that there were three "recruiting stations" in Saudi Arabia for funnelling fighters through the United States and other destinations into Afghanistan. The stations were located in Jeddah, Riyadh, and in the al-Sharqiyah Province. He later discovered that there were as many as 52 similar recruiting stations peppered throughout the United States, with the largest in Brooklyn, New York. Phoenix, Boston, Chicago, Tucson, Minnesota, Washington, D.C., and Washington State were all recruiting centers, targeting Muslim communities and African-American neighborhoods.

Springmann not only earned the hatred of the Arab-Afghan Legion recruiters and facilitators in Jeddah for questioning the flow of unsavory characters into the United States through the Jeddah consulate. Through his communications with foreign embassy intelligence personnel, he stumbled upon the fact that Saudi Arabia was secretly importing Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) from China. The CIA and NSA stations in Riyadh and Jeddah had completely missed the transaction, which had been secretly arranged by Saudi Arabia's ambassador in Washington, Prince Bandar bin-Sultan. (Prince Bandar would figure prominently in the Joint Congressional Inquiry into 9/11, having provided at least \$50-72,000 to two of



Author J. Michael Springmann, consular officer in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1987-1989.

the lead hijackers, according to the 28-page chapter from the Joint Inquiry report which has been suppressed by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.)

Apparently the American spooks operating out of the Kingdom were preoccupied with the Afghan project and had abandoned all other intelligence responsibilities.

Springmann later learned that his intelligence misfires from Jeddah made it into the President's Daily Briefing on more than one occasion.

The Strange Case of Ali Mohamed

Springmann's experiences in Jeddah overlapped the activities of one Ali Abdul Saoud Mohamed, a major in Egyptian Military Intelligence, who worked for the CIA on the Arab-Afghan Legions program. To this day, Mohamed's activities are shrouded in mystery and official secrets.

Major Mohamed was supposedly kicked out of the Egyptian Army in the mid-1980s, based on evidence that he was a secret member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad organization, a terrorist group that was responsible for the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. U.S. sources report that Major Mohamed was actually a double-agent, working for both Egyptian Military Intelligence and the CIA, penetrating the terrorist group.

In 1984, Ali Mohamed had walked into the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and offered his services to the CIA. In the subsequent years, he served as a liaison to various terrorist cells that were recruited to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. At one point, Major Mo-



Ali Abdul Saoud Mohamed. As a sergeant in the U.S. Army, he is reported to have trained Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

hamed accompanied Ayman al-Zawahiri, the head of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and currently the head of al-Qaeda, on a fundraising tour of the United States, soliciting private funds for the Afghan mujahideen cause.

Major Mohamed would marry an American woman and join the U.S. Army Special Forces. He spent several years teaching unconventional warfare and Arabic courses at the JFK Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, N.C. While serving in the U.S. Army and with the CIA, Mohamed made 57 trips to Afghanistan.

During his visits to South Asia, now Sgt. Mohamed, U.S. Army, wrote the terrorist training manual and playbook for al-Qaeda. He personally trained al-Zawahiri and Osama bin-Laden, along with countless other Arab-Afghan Legion fighters. Several of Sgt. Mohamed's "recruits" carried out the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. One of his American "students," El Sayyid Nosair, was convicted of plotting to bomb United Nations headquarters in New York.

In the mid-1990s, Sgt. Mohamed traveled to Africa, where he set up a number of al-Qaeda front companies to generate the funds for the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. He did the on-the-ground site profiling prior to the al-Qaeda bombings.

Within the al-Qaeda orbit, Sgt. Mohamed was known as Abu Mohamed al-Amriki ("the American").

On the surface, it appeared that justice finally caught up with Sgt. Mohamed. Following the African embassy

bombings, Mohamed's California apartment was raided by the FBI. Computer drives and documents proved his involvement in the planning of the attacks, which were the most deadly actions to date by al-Qaeda. Sgt. Mohamed was subpoenaed to testify before a Federal grand jury, and he was subsequently indicted.

In September 2000, Ali Mohamed reached a plea agreement, admitting to his role in the Africa embassy scheme. As of 2011, however, according to former FBI Special Agent Ali Soufan, he had not yet been sentenced.

A source familiar with the case reported to this author that there were "problems" with the evidence against Sgt. Mohamed. It seemed that prosecutors could not prove that his activities were not sanctioned either by Egyptian intelligence or the CIA. The deal that he struck included a guarantee that he would never be sentenced or serve any time in jail. In return, he provided a treasure trove of inside information on the first generation of al-Qaeda.

The Deeper Truth

These simple explanations hide a much deeper and murkier truth. The United States, Great Britain, and Saudi Arabia colluded to drive the Soviet Red Army out of Afghanistan, using an international unconventional army made up of avowed jihadists, criminals, and mercenaries. That Foreign Legion continued to operate, grow, and morph into al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and scores of other jihadist groups.

It would also appear that the Visas for Terrorists program grew and prospered, with disastrous consequences. Between 2000 and 2001, 15 of the 19 September 11, 2001 terrorists got their visas to enter the United States from the Consulate in Jeddah.

While these revelations are not new—the Springmann book first appeared, with virtually no media coverage, in 2014, and the Ali Mohamed case briefly grabbed news attention following the 9/11 attacks—they offer yet another powerful argument for the immediate declassification of the 28-page chapter from the original Joint Congressional Inquiry into 9/11—a chapter that highlights the Saudi funding of the terrorists.

It also makes clear that the real story of 9/11 is much nastier than just the Saudi role, and puts the issue of the British role and the involvement of contaminated elements of the U.S. intelligence establishment under a new spotlight.