

Spooky U.S. Background of 'Top Bin Laden Aide'

by Edward Spannaus

A former Egyptian Army officer, who also served in the U.S. Army Special Forces, has pled guilty to participating in a terrorist conspiracy with Osama bin Laden, to murder Americans. Ali Mohamed, described as a "top lieutenant" to the ubiquitous terrorist bankroller bin Laden, entered his guilty plea in Federal court in New York on Oct. 20, after plea negotiations which have been ongoing since Mohamed's arrest a little over two years ago.

Two features of the Ali Mohamed case are obvious to any serious observer:

1. Mohamed's "confession" just happens to coincide with a crescendo of calls for retaliatory attacks on the Afghanistan base camps of Osama bin Laden, on the unproven supposition that bin Laden's largely mythical organization was responsible for the Oct. 12 attack on the *USS Cole* in Yemen.

2. Even a cursory examination of what is known about Mohamed's background, indicates that there is much more to his case than meets the eye. His record suggests that he has been an asset of U.S. (and perhaps other) intelligence agencies for at least two decades, and he was regularly in contact with the FBI and other agencies during the time he was allegedly conspiring to commit acts of terrorism against the United States.

The context in which Mohamed was operating, was the Reagan-Bush Administration's covert Afghanistan "freedom fighter" crusade—an extension of Zbigniew Brzezinski's "Arc of Crisis" policy from the 1977-81 Carter Administration. Under the structure adopted early in the Reagan Administration, Vice President George Bush was in charge of such covert operations, two of the most notable ones being the covert U.S. military support for irregular warfare in Central America and in Afghanistan.

A Jihadist at Fort Bragg

In his hearing on Oct. 20 in Federal court in Manhattan, Mohamed said that he had become involved with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad organization in the early 1980s, and that he had been introduced to bin Laden's Al Qaeda organization in the early 1990s. He said that he helped transport bin Laden from Afghanistan to Sudan in 1991, that he had given military and explosives training to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in 1992, and that he carried out surveillance of the U.S.

Embassy and other facilities in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1993; the Nairobi Embassy building was later bombed in August 1998, with bin Laden's networks being held responsible.

Mohamed's military record—at least that part which is publicly available—suggests that this is a very bizarre case indeed; but, it can help to shed some light on how the so-called "bin Laden organization"—not the mythical "terrorist international" of newspaper accounts—was actually created, and why it serves as such a useful foil for all kinds of terrorism/counterterrorism games run by British, U.S., and Israeli intelligence agencies.

(The real Osama bin Laden comes from a wealthy Saudi family; he began ingratiating himself with Afghansi mujahideen in 1984, when he would show up in Pakistani hospitals, wearing an Afghan tunic over his finely tailored English trousers and custom-made English boots, dispensing money to the families of wounded resistance fighters. His real base of operations, to this day, is not Pakistan or Afghanistan, but London.)

Ali Mohamed enlisted in the Egyptian Army in 1971, spending the first three years at the Military Academy in Cairo, and eventually rising to the rank of major by the time he left in 1984. In 1981—at the same time he says, that he became involved with Islamic Jihad—while a captain in the Egyptian Army, he attended the U.S. Army Special Forces Officer Course at the Institute of Military Assistance at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Earlier that same year, he took a paratrooper course at Fort Benning, Georgia.

The Institute for Military Assistance at that time was comprised of the former U.S. Army Civil Affairs School from Fort Gordon, Georgia, and the U.S. Army's Special Warfare School, already at Fort Bragg. These were both key military components of the Central Intelligence Agency's counterinsurgency, or "civil affairs," programs, which were explicitly modelled on British programs of the same nature. The curriculum for the Special Warfare School was developed by the CIA's Ed Lansdale, the architect of the failed "pacification" programs in Vietnam. In 1963, the Institute for Military Assistance was renamed the JFK Special Warfare Center and School, and it is still known as such today.

It is no secret that these training programs for foreign military officers, especially those in unconventional warfare, were used as a method of recruiting foreign military officers as assets for the CIA or U.S. military intelligence agencies.

'Blowback'

Mohamed left the Egyptian Army in 1984, and worked as a counterterrorism official for Egypt Airlines for 18 months; then, in 1985, he came to the United States. But, according to published reports, around the time he left the Egyptian Army, he approached CIA officers in Egypt, and offered to work for them.

According to the official version of events, Mohamed soon came to be regarded as "unreliable," and his offer was

turned down. Moreover, the Agency claims that it placed his name on a State Department terrorist watch list.

Nevertheless, Mohamed was admitted to the United States later that year. The *Boston Globe* has reported that he was admitted under a special CIA visa program—which is plausible, given the CIA’s involvement in promoting, and assistance in promoting the Afghan resistance at that time.

“CIA,” in this context, does not necessarily mean the Central Intelligence Agency. In the wake of the severe cut-backs in the CIA’s clandestine operations in the late 1970s, many covert operation capabilities were shifted into military intelligence agencies, which had bigger budgets, and which were subject to much less media scrutiny and Congressional oversight than was the CIA.

The giveaway is that, despite Mohamed’s presence on the terrorist watch list, within a year, he had enlisted for an eight-year stint in the U.S. Army—three years of active duty, and five more years in the reserves. For most of his period of active duty, he was assigned to the Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg. After this, he completed his five years in the reserves, and was honorably discharged in 1994. His military records indicate that the investigation, under which he would have obtained a security clearance, was inexplicably never completed.

In 1988, he received a commendation for “patriotism, valor, fidelity, and professional excellence” from the Army, and just before he left active duty in November 1989, he was awarded an Army Commendation Medal, “For Meritorious Service,” from the JFK Special Warfare Center.

Meanwhile, it was known by all involved, that Mohamed had gone to Afghanistan during 1988 for a period of about a month, while on military leave, and had fought with the mujahideen against Soviet troops. Two of his supervisors were sufficiently alarmed about this (or concerned to cover their own rear ends), that they filed reports with Army officials at Fort Bragg, and with Army Intelligence. During 1989, while still on active duty, Mohamed began working with the Afghan recruiting center being run by Sheikh Abdel Rahman in Brooklyn, and Mohamed conducted training sessions in guerrilla warfare in New Jersey for American Muslims recruited to go fight in Afghanistan.

It is a matter of public record that Mohamed was in contact with the FBI, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and other agencies, up until the point at which he was arrested, in September 1998. His arrest was kept secret for eight months, and he did not cooperate with the other defendants in the bin Laden case. His plea bargain was only announced on Oct. 20, but had obviously been in the works for the past two years, if not longer.

Who Ran Terrorism in New York City?

Mohamed’s case is reminiscent of that of another FBI informant and provocateur, Emad Salem, which surfaced around the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Salem was also a former Egyptian Army officer, who was working with Sheikh Rahman, who was reportedly brought into the United States by the “CIA” in the 1980s to recruit American Muslims and blacks to go fight the Soviets in Afghanistan.

After having been tried, and acquitted, for involvement in the October 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Rahman received the first of four visas to enter the United States in 1986. In 1991, he was granted permanent resident status in the United States.

The center of Rahman’s recruiting operation was the Alkifah Refugee Center in Brooklyn. The Center was used to funnel recruits into the Afghansi faction headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the most fanatical, anti-American of all the mujahideen factions in the Afghanistan resistance—but the faction most favored by U.S. intelligence, which funnelled at least \$1 billion to him. In 1985, Hekmatyar came to the United States and visited the Refugee Center in Brooklyn.

The Center first came to public attention around the 1990 assassination of Jewish Defense League founder Meir Kahane in 1990: Sayyid Nosair, the Egyptian immigrant convicted on weapons charges in connection with the Kahane killing, was a regular at the Center.

The next time the Center came under a spotlight was in the aftermath of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, when Sheikh Rahman and others from the Refugee Center were charged with, and convicted of, that bombing; they were also later convicted of a conspiracy to blow up various other New York landmarks.

Nosair was among those charged in the Landmarks case; his defense was, that his activities were part of an American-sponsored covert operation to arm and train the Afghanistan resistance movement. Nosair contended that his link to the U.S. covert effort, was none other than Ali Mohamed, who had provided training to him in 1989.

Salem, who was the major FBI informant in the World Trade Center and Landmarks cases, had come to the United States in 1988; he had been a lieutenant colonel in the Egyptian Army. Salem penetrated the defense support network for Nosair, who was charged in the Kahane murder, and worked his way into the circles around Sheikh Rahman and the Refugee Center.

According to testimony in the World Trade Center trial, Salem had instructed the defendants on how to make a bomb; he himself claimed that he had intended to substitute harmless materials for the explosives at the last minute, but that the FBI then called this aspect of the operation off, which permitted the bombing to go ahead.

Salem was also an employee of a private security company run by Graham Knowles, a former British Army officer and an expert on explosives; Knowles’s 1976 book *Bomb Security Guide* is still used as a standard reference for security personnel.