

## 2

# THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW TERRORISM

## 2.1 A DECLARATION OF WAR

In February 1998, the 40-year-old Saudi exile Usama Bin Ladin and a fugitive Egyptian physician, Ayman al Zawahiri, arranged from their Afghan headquarters for an Arabic newspaper in London to publish what they termed a fatwa issued in the name of a “World Islamic Front.” A fatwa is normally an interpretation of Islamic law by a respected Islamic authority, but neither Bin Ladin, Zawahiri, nor the three others who signed this statement were scholars of Islamic law. Claiming that America had declared war against God and his messenger, they called for the murder of any American, anywhere on earth, as the “individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.”<sup>1</sup>

Three months later, when interviewed in Afghanistan by ABC-TV, Bin Ladin enlarged on these themes.<sup>2</sup> He claimed it was more important for Muslims to kill Americans than to kill other infidels. “It is far better for anyone to kill a single American soldier than to squander his efforts on other activities,” he said. Asked whether he approved of terrorism and of attacks on civilians, he replied: “We believe that the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans. Nothing could stop you except perhaps retaliation in kind. We do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets.”

*Note: Islamic names often do not follow the Western practice of the consistent use of surnames. Given the variety of names we mention, we chose to refer to individuals by the last word in the names by which they are known: Nawaf al Hazmi as Hazmi, for instance, omitting the article “al” that would be part of their name in their own societies. We generally make an exception for the more familiar English usage of “Bin” as part of a last name, as in Bin Ladin. Further, there is no universally accepted way to transliterate Arabic words and names into English. We have relied on a mix of common sense, the sound of the name in Arabic, and common usage in source materials, the press, or government documents. When we quote from a source document, we use its transliteration, e.g., “al Qida” instead of al Qaeda.*

Though novel for its open endorsement of indiscriminate killing, Bin Ladin's 1998 declaration was only the latest in the long series of his public and private calls since 1992 that singled out the United States for attack.

In August 1996, Bin Ladin had issued his own self-styled fatwa calling on Muslims to drive American soldiers out of Saudi Arabia. The long, disjointed document condemned the Saudi monarchy for allowing the presence of an army of infidels in a land with the sites most sacred to Islam, and celebrated recent suicide bombings of American military facilities in the Kingdom. It praised the 1983 suicide bombing in Beirut that killed 241 U.S. Marines, the 1992 bombing in Aden, and especially the 1993 firefight in Somalia after which the United States "left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you."<sup>3</sup>

Bin Ladin said in his ABC interview that he and his followers had been preparing in Somalia for another long struggle, like that against the Soviets in Afghanistan, but "the United States rushed out of Somalia in shame and disgrace." Citing the Soviet army's withdrawal from Afghanistan as proof that a ragged army of dedicated Muslims could overcome a superpower, he told the interviewer: "We are certain that we shall—with the grace of Allah—prevail over the Americans." He went on to warn that "If the present injustice continues . . . , it will inevitably move the battle to American soil."<sup>4</sup>

Plans to attack the United States were developed with unwavering single-mindedness throughout the 1990s. Bin Ladin saw himself as called "to follow in the footsteps of the Messenger and to communicate his message to all nations,"<sup>5</sup> and to serve as the rallying point and organizer of a new kind of war to destroy America and bring the world to Islam.

## 2.2 BIN LADIN'S APPEAL IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

It is the story of eccentric and violent ideas sprouting in the fertile ground of political and social turmoil. It is the story of an organization poised to seize its historical moment. How did Bin Ladin—with his call for the indiscriminate killing of Americans—win thousands of followers and some degree of approval from millions more?

The history, culture, and body of beliefs from which Bin Ladin has shaped and spread his message are largely unknown to many Americans. Seizing on symbols of Islam's past greatness, he promises to restore pride to people who consider themselves the victims of successive foreign masters. He uses cultural and religious allusions to the holy Qur'an and some of its interpreters. He appeals to people disoriented by cyclonic change as they confront modernity and globalization. His rhetoric selectively draws from multiple sources—Islam, history, and the region's political and economic malaise. He also stresses grievances against the United States widely shared in the Muslim world. He



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*Usama Bin Ladin at a news conference in Afghanistan in 1998*

inveighed against the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, the home of Islam's holiest sites. He spoke of the suffering of the Iraqi people as a result of sanctions imposed after the Gulf War, and he protested U.S. support of Israel.

### **Islam**

Islam (a word that literally means “surrender to the will of God”) arose in Arabia with what Muslims believe are a series of revelations to the Prophet Mohammed from the one and only God, the God of Abraham and of Jesus. These revelations, conveyed by the angel Gabriel, are recorded in the Qur’an. Muslims believe that these revelations, given to the greatest and last of a chain of prophets stretching from Abraham through Jesus, complete God’s message to humanity. The Hadith, which recount Mohammed’s sayings and deeds as recorded by his contemporaries, are another fundamental source. A third key element is the Sharia, the code of law derived from the Qur’an and the Hadith.

Islam is divided into two main branches, Sunni and Shia. Soon after the

Prophet's death, the question of choosing a new leader, or *caliph*, for the Muslim community, or *Ummah*, arose. Initially, his successors could be drawn from the Prophet's contemporaries, but with time, this was no longer possible. Those who became the Shia held that any leader of the Ummah must be a direct descendant of the Prophet; those who became the Sunni argued that lineal descent was not required if the candidate met other standards of faith and knowledge. After bloody struggles, the Sunni became (and remain) the majority sect. (The Shia are dominant in Iran.) The Caliphate—the institutionalized leadership of the Ummah—thus was a Sunni institution that continued until 1924, first under Arab and eventually under Ottoman Turkish control.

Many Muslims look back at the century after the revelations to the Prophet Mohammed as a golden age. Its memory is strongest among the Arabs. What happened then—the spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and even into Europe within less than a century—seemed, and seems, miraculous.<sup>6</sup> Nostalgia for Islam's past glory remains a powerful force.

Islam is both a faith and a code of conduct for all aspects of life. For many Muslims, a good government would be one guided by the moral principles of their faith. This does not necessarily translate into a desire for clerical rule and the abolition of a secular state. It does mean that some Muslims tend to be uncomfortable with distinctions between religion and state, though Muslim rulers throughout history have readily separated the two.

To extremists, however, such divisions, as well as the existence of parliaments and legislation, only prove these rulers to be false Muslims usurping God's authority over all aspects of life. Periodically, the Islamic world has seen surges of what, for want of a better term, is often labeled "fundamentalism."<sup>7</sup> Denouncing waywardness among the faithful, some clerics have appealed for a return to observance of the literal teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. One scholar from the fourteenth century from whom Bin Ladin selectively quotes, Ibn Taimiyyah, condemned both corrupt rulers and the clerics who failed to criticize them. He urged Muslims to read the Qur'an and the Hadith for themselves, not to depend solely on learned interpreters like himself but to hold one another to account for the quality of their observance.<sup>8</sup>

The extreme Islamist version of history blames the decline from Islam's golden age on the rulers and people who turned away from the true path of their religion, thereby leaving Islam vulnerable to encroaching foreign powers eager to steal their land, wealth, and even their souls.

### **Bin Ladin's Worldview**

Despite his claims to universal leadership, Bin Ladin offers an extreme view of Islamic history designed to appeal mainly to Arabs and Sunnis. He draws on fundamentalists who blame the eventual destruction of the Caliphate on leaders who abandoned the pure path of religious devotion.<sup>9</sup> He repeatedly calls on his followers to embrace martyrdom since "the walls of oppression and

humiliation cannot be demolished except in a rain of bullets.”<sup>10</sup> For those yearning for a lost sense of order in an older, more tranquil world, he offers his “Caliphate” as an imagined alternative to today’s uncertainty. For others, he offers simplistic conspiracies to explain their world.

Bin Ladin also relies heavily on the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb. A member of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>11</sup> executed in 1966 on charges of attempting to overthrow the government, Qutb mixed Islamic scholarship with a very superficial acquaintance with Western history and thought. Sent by the Egyptian government to study in the United States in the late 1940s, Qutb returned with an enormous loathing of Western society and history. He dismissed Western achievements as entirely material, arguing that Western society possesses “nothing that will satisfy its own conscience and justify its existence.”<sup>12</sup>

Three basic themes emerge from Qutb’s writings. First, he claimed that the world was beset with barbarism, licentiousness, and unbelief (a condition he called *jahiliyya*, the religious term for the period of ignorance prior to the revelations given to the Prophet Mohammed). Qutb argued that humans can choose only between Islam and *jahiliyya*. Second, he warned that more people, including Muslims, were attracted to *jahiliyya* and its material comforts than to his view of Islam; *jahiliyya* could therefore triumph over Islam. Third, no middle ground exists in what Qutb conceived as a struggle between God and Satan. All Muslims—as he defined them—therefore must take up arms in this fight. Any Muslim who rejects his ideas is just one more nonbeliever worthy of destruction.<sup>13</sup>

Bin Ladin shares Qutb’s stark view, permitting him and his followers to rationalize even unprovoked mass murder as righteous defense of an embattled faith. Many Americans have wondered, “Why do ‘they’ hate us?” Some also ask, “What can we do to stop these attacks?”

Bin Ladin and al Qaeda have given answers to both these questions. To the first, they say that America had attacked Islam; America is responsible for all conflicts involving Muslims. Thus Americans are blamed when Israelis fight with Palestinians, when Russians fight with Chechens, when Indians fight with Kashmiri Muslims, and when the Philippine government fights ethnic Muslims in its southern islands. America is also held responsible for the governments of Muslim countries, derided by al Qaeda as “your agents.” Bin Ladin has stated flatly, “Our fight against these governments is not separate from our fight against you.”<sup>14</sup> These charges found a ready audience among millions of Arabs and Muslims angry at the United States because of issues ranging from Iraq to Palestine to America’s support for their countries’ repressive rulers.

Bin Ladin’s grievance with the United States may have started in reaction to specific U.S. policies but it quickly became far deeper. To the second question, what America could do, al Qaeda’s answer was that America should abandon the Middle East, convert to Islam, and end the immorality and godlessness of its society and culture: “It is saddening to tell you that you are the worst civilization witnessed by the history of mankind.” If the United States did not

comply, it would be at war with the Islamic nation, a nation that al Qaeda's leaders said "desires death more than you desire life."<sup>15</sup>

### **History and Political Context**

Few fundamentalist movements in the Islamic world gained lasting political power. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, fundamentalists helped articulate anticolonial grievances but played little role in the overwhelmingly secular struggles for independence after World War I. Western-educated lawyers, soldiers, and officials led most independence movements, and clerical influence and traditional culture were seen as obstacles to national progress.

After gaining independence from Western powers following World War II, the Arab Middle East followed an arc from initial pride and optimism to today's mix of indifference, cynicism, and despair. In several countries, a dynastic state already existed or was quickly established under a paramount tribal family. Monarchies in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Jordan still survive today. Those in Egypt, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen were eventually overthrown by secular nationalist revolutionaries.

The secular regimes promised a glowing future, often tied to sweeping ideologies (such as those promoted by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab Socialism or the Ba'ath Party of Syria and Iraq) that called for a single, secular Arab state. However, what emerged were almost invariably autocratic regimes that were usually unwilling to tolerate any opposition—even in countries, such as Egypt, that had a parliamentary tradition. Over time, their policies—repression, rewards, emigration, and the displacement of popular anger onto scapegoats (generally foreign)—were shaped by the desire to cling to power.

The bankruptcy of secular, autocratic nationalism was evident across the Muslim world by the late 1970s. At the same time, these regimes had closed off nearly all paths for peaceful opposition, forcing their critics to choose silence, exile, or violent opposition. Iran's 1979 revolution swept a Shia theocracy into power. Its success encouraged Sunni fundamentalists elsewhere.

In the 1980s, awash in sudden oil wealth, Saudi Arabia competed with Shia Iran to promote its Sunni fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, Wahhabism. The Saudi government, always conscious of its duties as the custodian of Islam's holiest places, joined with wealthy Arabs from the Kingdom and other states bordering the Persian Gulf in donating money to build mosques and religious schools that could preach and teach their interpretation of Islamic doctrine.

In this competition for legitimacy, secular regimes had no alternative to offer. Instead, in a number of cases their rulers sought to buy off local Islamist movements by ceding control of many social and educational issues. Emboldened rather than satisfied, the Islamists continued to push for power—a trend especially clear in Egypt. Confronted with a violent Islamist movement that killed President Anwar Sadat in 1981, the Egyptian government combined

harsh repression of Islamic militants with harassment of moderate Islamic scholars and authors, driving many into exile. In Pakistan, a military regime sought to justify its seizure of power by a pious public stance and an embrace of unprecedented Islamist influence on education and society.

These experiments in political Islam faltered during the 1990s: the Iranian revolution lost momentum, prestige, and public support, and Pakistan's rulers found that most of its population had little enthusiasm for fundamentalist Islam. Islamist revival movements gained followers across the Muslim world, but failed to secure political power except in Iran and Sudan. In Algeria, where in 1991 Islamists seemed almost certain to win power through the ballot box, the military preempted their victory, triggering a brutal civil war that continues today. Opponents of today's rulers have few, if any, ways to participate in the existing political system. They are thus a ready audience for calls to Muslims to purify their society, reject unwelcome modernization, and adhere strictly to the Sharia.

### **Social and Economic Malaise**

In the 1970s and early 1980s, an unprecedented flood of wealth led the then largely unmodernized oil states to attempt to shortcut decades of development. They funded huge infrastructure projects, vastly expanded education, and created subsidized social welfare programs. These programs established a widespread feeling of entitlement without a corresponding sense of social obligations. By the late 1980s, diminishing oil revenues, the economic drain from many unprofitable development projects, and population growth made these entitlement programs unsustainable. The resulting cutbacks created enormous resentment among recipients who had come to see government largesse as their right. This resentment was further stoked by public understanding of how much oil income had gone straight into the pockets of the rulers, their friends, and their helpers.

Unlike the oil states (or Afghanistan, where real economic development has barely begun), the other Arab nations and Pakistan once had seemed headed toward balanced modernization. The established commercial, financial, and industrial sectors in these states, supported by an entrepreneurial spirit and widespread understanding of free enterprise, augured well. But unprofitable heavy industry, state monopolies, and opaque bureaucracies slowly stifled growth. More importantly, these state-centered regimes placed their highest priority on preserving the elite's grip on national wealth. Unwilling to foster dynamic economies that could create jobs attractive to educated young men, the countries became economically stagnant and reliant on the safety valve of worker emigration either to the Arab oil states or to the West. Furthermore, the repression and isolation of women in many Muslim countries have not only seriously limited individual opportunity but also crippled overall economic productivity.<sup>16</sup>

By the 1990s, high birthrates and declining rates of infant mortality had

produced a common problem throughout the Muslim world: a large, steadily increasing population of young men without any reasonable expectation of suitable or steady employment—a sure prescription for social turbulence. Many of these young men, such as the enormous number trained only in religious schools, lacked the skills needed by their societies. Far more acquired valuable skills but lived in stagnant economies that could not generate satisfying jobs.

Millions, pursuing secular as well as religious studies, were products of educational systems that generally devoted little if any attention to the rest of the world's thought, history, and culture. The secular education reflected a strong cultural preference for technical fields over the humanities and social sciences. Many of these young men, even if able to study abroad, lacked the perspective and skills needed to understand a different culture.

Frustrated in their search for a decent living, unable to benefit from an education often obtained at the cost of great family sacrifice, and blocked from starting families of their own, some of these young men were easy targets for radicalization.

### **Bin Ladin's Historical Opportunity**

Most Muslims prefer a peaceful and inclusive vision of their faith, not the violent sectarianism of Bin Ladin. Among Arabs, Bin Ladin's followers are commonly nicknamed *takfiri*, or “those who define other Muslims as unbelievers,” because of their readiness to demonize and murder those with whom they disagree. Beyond the theology lies the simple human fact that most Muslims, like most other human beings, are repelled by mass murder and barbarism whatever their justification.

“All Americans must recognize that the face of terror is not the true face of Islam,” President Bush observed. “Islam is a faith that brings comfort to a billion people around the world. It's a faith that has made brothers and sisters of every race. It's a faith based upon love, not hate.”<sup>17</sup> Yet as political, social, and economic problems created flammable societies, Bin Ladin used Islam's most extreme, fundamentalist traditions as his match. All these elements—including religion—combined in an explosive compound.

Other extremists had, and have, followings of their own. But in appealing to societies full of discontent, Bin Ladin remained credible as other leaders and symbols faded. He could stand as a symbol of resistance—above all, resistance to the West and to America. He could present himself and his allies as victorious warriors in the one great successful experience for Islamic militancy in the 1980s: the Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation.

By 1998, Bin Ladin had a distinctive appeal, as he focused on attacking America. He argued that other extremists, who aimed at local rulers or Israel, did not go far enough. They had not taken on what he called “the head of the snake.”<sup>18</sup>



Finally, Bin Ladin had another advantage: a substantial, worldwide organization. By the time he issued his February 1998 declaration of war, Bin Ladin had nurtured that organization for nearly ten years. He could attract, train, and use recruits for ever more ambitious attacks, rallying new adherents with each demonstration that his was the movement of the future.

### 2.3 THE RISE OF BIN LADIN AND AL QAEDA (1988–1992)

A decade of conflict in Afghanistan, from 1979 to 1989, gave Islamist extremists a rallying point and training field. A Communist government in Afghanistan gained power in 1978 but was unable to establish enduring control. At the end of 1979, the Soviet government sent in military units to ensure that the country would remain securely under Moscow's influence. The response was an Afghan national resistance movement that defeated Soviet forces.<sup>19</sup>

Young Muslims from around the world flocked to Afghanistan to join as volunteers in what was seen as a “holy war”—*jihad*—against an invader. The largest numbers came from the Middle East. Some were Saudis, and among them was Usama Bin Ladin.

Twenty-three when he arrived in Afghanistan in 1980, Bin Ladin was the seventeenth of 57 children of a Saudi construction magnate. Six feet five and thin, Bin Ladin appeared to be ungainly but was in fact quite athletic, skilled as a horseman, runner, climber, and soccer player. He had attended Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia. By some accounts, he had been interested there in religious studies, inspired by tape recordings of fiery sermons by Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian and a disciple of Qutb. Bin Ladin was conspicuous among the volunteers not because he showed evidence of religious learning but because he had access to some of his family's huge fortune. Though he took part in at least one actual battle, he became known chiefly as a person who generously helped fund the anti-Soviet *jihad*.<sup>20</sup>

Bin Ladin understood better than most of the volunteers the extent to which the continuation and eventual success of the *jihad* in Afghanistan depended on an increasingly complex, almost worldwide organization. This organization included a financial support network that came to be known as the “Golden Chain,” put together mainly by financiers in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states. Donations flowed through charities or other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Bin Ladin and the “Afghan Arabs” drew largely on funds raised by this network, whose agents roamed world markets to buy arms and supplies for the *mujahideen*, or “holy warriors.”<sup>21</sup>

Mosques, schools, and boardinghouses served as recruiting stations in many parts of the world, including the United States. Some were set up by Islamic extremists or their financial backers. Bin Ladin had an important part in this

activity. He and the cleric Azzam had joined in creating a “Bureau of Services” (Mektab al Khidmat, or MAK), which channeled recruits into Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup>

The international environment for Bin Ladin’s efforts was ideal. Saudi Arabia and the United States supplied billions of dollars worth of secret assistance to rebel groups in Afghanistan fighting the Soviet occupation. This assistance was funneled through Pakistan: the Pakistani military intelligence service (Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or ISID), helped train the rebels and distribute the arms. But Bin Ladin and his comrades had their own sources of support and training, and they received little or no assistance from the United States.<sup>23</sup>

April 1988 brought victory for the Afghan jihad. Moscow declared it would pull its military forces out of Afghanistan within the next nine months. As the Soviets began their withdrawal, the jihad’s leaders debated what to do next.

Bin Ladin and Azzam agreed that the organization successfully created for Afghanistan should not be allowed to dissolve. They established what they called a base or foundation (al Qaeda) as a potential general headquarters for future jihad.<sup>24</sup> Though Azzam had been considered number one in the MAK, by August 1988 Bin Ladin was clearly the leader (*emir*) of al Qaeda. This organization’s structure included as its operating arms an intelligence component, a military committee, a financial committee, a political committee, and a committee in charge of media affairs and propaganda. It also had an Advisory Council (Shura) made up of Bin Ladin’s inner circle.<sup>25</sup>

Bin Ladin’s assumption of the helm of al Qaeda was evidence of his growing self-confidence and ambition. He soon made clear his desire for unchallenged control and for preparing the mujahideen to fight anywhere in the world. Azzam, by contrast, favored continuing to fight in Afghanistan until it had a true Islamist government. And, as a Palestinian, he saw Israel as the top priority for the next stage.<sup>26</sup>

Whether the dispute was about power, personal differences, or strategy, it ended on November 24, 1989, when a remotely controlled car bomb killed Azzam and both of his sons. The killers were assumed to be rival Egyptians. The outcome left Bin Ladin indisputably in charge of what remained of the MAK and al Qaeda.<sup>27</sup>

Through writers like Qutb, and the presence of Egyptian Islamist teachers in the Saudi educational system, Islamists already had a strong intellectual influence on Bin Ladin and his al Qaeda colleagues. By the late 1980s, the Egyptian Islamist movement—badly battered in the government crackdown following President Sadat’s assassination—was centered in two major organizations: the Islamic Group and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. A spiritual guide for both, but especially the Islamic Group, was the so-called Blind Sheikh, Omar Abdel Rahman. His preaching had inspired the assassination of Sadat. After being in and out of Egyptian prisons during the 1980s, Abdel Rahman found

refuge in the United States. From his headquarters in Jersey City, he distributed messages calling for the murder of unbelievers.<sup>28</sup>

The most important Egyptian in Bin Ladin's circle was a surgeon, Ayman al Zawahiri, who led a strong faction of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Many of his followers became important members in the new organization, and his own close ties with Bin Ladin led many to think of him as the deputy head of al Qaeda. He would in fact become Bin Ladin's deputy some years later, when they merged their organizations.<sup>29</sup>

### **Bin Ladin Moves to Sudan**

By the fall of 1989, Bin Ladin had sufficient stature among Islamic extremists that a Sudanese political leader, Hassan al Turabi, urged him to transplant his whole organization to Sudan. Turabi headed the National Islamic Front in a coalition that had recently seized power in Khartoum.<sup>30</sup> Bin Ladin agreed to help Turabi in an ongoing war against African Christian separatists in southern Sudan and also to do some road building. Turabi in return would let Bin Ladin use Sudan as a base for worldwide business operations and for preparations for jihad.<sup>31</sup> While agents of Bin Ladin began to buy property in Sudan in 1990,<sup>32</sup> Bin Ladin himself moved from Afghanistan back to Saudi Arabia.

In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Bin Ladin, whose efforts in Afghanistan had earned him celebrity and respect, proposed to the Saudi monarchy that he summon mujahideen for a jihad to retake Kuwait. He was rebuffed, and the Saudis joined the U.S.-led coalition. After the Saudis agreed to allow U.S. armed forces to be based in the Kingdom, Bin Ladin and a number of Islamic clerics began to publicly denounce the arrangement. The Saudi government exiled the clerics and undertook to silence Bin Ladin by, among other things, taking away his passport. With help from a dissident member of the royal family, he managed to get out of the country under the pretext of attending an Islamic gathering in Pakistan in April 1991.<sup>33</sup> By 1994, the Saudi government would freeze his financial assets and revoke his citizenship.<sup>34</sup> He no longer had a country he could call his own.

Bin Ladin moved to Sudan in 1991 and set up a large and complex set of intertwined business and terrorist enterprises. In time, the former would encompass numerous companies and a global network of bank accounts and nongovernmental institutions. Fulfilling his bargain with Turabi, Bin Ladin used his construction company to build a new highway from Khartoum to Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. Meanwhile, al Qaeda finance officers and top operatives used their positions in Bin Ladin's businesses to acquire weapons, explosives, and technical equipment for terrorist purposes. One founding member, Abu Hajar al Iraqi, used his position as head of a Bin Ladin investment company to carry out procurement trips from western Europe to the Far East. Two others, Wadi al Hage and Mubarak Douri, who had become acquainted in Tuc-

son, Arizona, in the late 1980s, went as far afield as China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the former Soviet states of Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>35</sup>

Bin Ladin's impressive array of offices covertly provided financial and other support for terrorist activities. The network included a major business enterprise in Cyprus; a "services" branch in Zagreb; an office of the Benevolence International Foundation in Sarajevo, which supported the Bosnian Muslims in their conflict with Serbia and Croatia; and an NGO in Baku, Azerbaijan, that was employed as well by Egyptian Islamic Jihad both as a source and conduit for finances and as a support center for the Muslim rebels in Chechnya. He also made use of the already-established Third World Relief Agency (TWRA) headquartered in Vienna, whose branch office locations included Zagreb and Budapest. (Bin Ladin later set up an NGO in Nairobi as a cover for operatives there.)<sup>36</sup>

Bin Ladin now had a vision of himself as head of an international jihad confederation. In Sudan, he established an "Islamic Army Shura" that was to serve as the coordinating body for the consortium of terrorist groups with which he was forging alliances. It was composed of his own al Qaeda Shura together with leaders or representatives of terrorist organizations that were still independent. In building this Islamic army, he enlisted groups from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, and Eritrea. Al Qaeda also established cooperative but less formal relationships with other extremist groups from these same countries; from the African states of Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Uganda; and from the Southeast Asian states of Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Bin Ladin maintained connections in the Bosnian conflict as well.<sup>37</sup> The groundwork for a true global terrorist network was being laid.

Bin Ladin also provided equipment and training assistance to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines and also to a newly forming Philippine group that called itself the Abu Sayyaf Brigade, after one of the major Afghan jihadist commanders.<sup>38</sup> Al Qaeda helped Jemaah Islamiya (JI), a nascent organization headed by Indonesian Islamists with cells scattered across Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. It also aided a Pakistani group engaged in insurrectionist attacks in Kashmir. In mid-1991, Bin Ladin dispatched a band of supporters to the northern Afghanistan border to assist the Tajikistan Islamists in the ethnic conflicts that had been boiling there even before the Central Asian departments of the Soviet Union became independent states.<sup>39</sup>

This pattern of expansion through building alliances extended to the United States. A Muslim organization called al Khifa had numerous branch offices, the largest of which was in the Farouq mosque in Brooklyn. In the mid-1980s, it had been set up as one of the first outposts of Azzam and Bin Ladin's MAK.<sup>40</sup> Other cities with branches of al Khifa included Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Tucson.<sup>41</sup> Al Khifa recruited American Muslims to

fight in Afghanistan; some of them would participate in terrorist actions in the United States in the early 1990s and in al Qaeda operations elsewhere, including the 1998 attacks on U.S. embassies in East Africa.

## 2.4 BUILDING AN ORGANIZATION, DECLARING WAR ON THE UNITED STATES (1992–1996)

Bin Ladin began delivering diatribes against the United States before he left Saudi Arabia. He continued to do so after he arrived in Sudan. In early 1992, the al Qaeda leadership issued a fatwa calling for jihad against the Western “occupation” of Islamic lands. Specifically singling out U.S. forces for attack, the language resembled that which would appear in Bin Ladin’s public fatwa in August 1996. In ensuing weeks, Bin Ladin delivered an often-repeated lecture on the need to cut off “the head of the snake.”<sup>42</sup>

By this time, Bin Ladin was well-known and a senior figure among Islamist extremists, especially those in Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Afghanistan–Pakistan border region. Still, he was just one among many diverse terrorist barons. Some of Bin Ladin’s close comrades were more peers than subordinates. For example, Usama Asmurai, also known as Wali Khan, worked with Bin Ladin in the early 1980s and helped him in the Philippines and in Tajikistan. The Egyptian spiritual guide based in New Jersey, the Blind Sheikh, whom Bin Ladin admired, was also in the network. Among sympathetic peers in Afghanistan were a few of the warlords still fighting for power and Abu Zubaydah, who helped operate a popular terrorist training camp near the border with Pakistan. There were also rootless but experienced operatives, such as Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who—though not necessarily formal members of someone else’s organization—were traveling around the world and joining in projects that were supported by or linked to Bin Ladin, the Blind Sheikh, or their associates.<sup>43</sup>

In now analyzing the terrorist programs carried out by members of this network, it would be misleading to apply the label “al Qaeda operations” too often in these early years. Yet it would also be misleading to ignore the significance of these connections. And in this network, Bin Ladin’s agenda stood out. While his allied Islamist groups were focused on local battles, such as those in Egypt, Algeria, Bosnia, or Chechnya, Bin Ladin concentrated on attacking the “far enemy”—the United States.

### **Attacks Known and Suspected**

After U.S. troops deployed to Somalia in late 1992, al Qaeda leaders formulated a fatwa demanding their eviction. In December, bombs exploded at two hotels in Aden where U.S. troops routinely stopped en route to Somalia, killing two, but no Americans. The perpetrators are reported to have belonged to a

group from southern Yemen headed by a Yemeni member of Bin Ladin's Islamic Army Shura; some in the group had trained at an al Qaeda camp in Sudan.<sup>44</sup>

Al Qaeda leaders set up a Nairobi cell and used it to send weapons and trainers to the Somali warlords battling U.S. forces, an operation directly supervised by al Qaeda's military leader.<sup>45</sup> Scores of trainers flowed to Somalia over the ensuing months, including most of the senior members and weapons training experts of al Qaeda's military committee. These trainers were later heard boasting that their assistance led to the October 1993 shootdown of two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters by members of a Somali militia group and to the subsequent withdrawal of U.S. forces in early 1994.<sup>46</sup>

In November 1995, a car bomb exploded outside a Saudi-U.S. joint facility in Riyadh for training the Saudi National Guard. Five Americans and two officials from India were killed. The Saudi government arrested four perpetrators, who admitted being inspired by Bin Ladin. They were promptly executed. Though nothing proves that Bin Ladin ordered this attack, U.S. intelligence subsequently learned that al Qaeda leaders had decided a year earlier to attack a U.S. target in Saudi Arabia, and had shipped explosives to the peninsula for this purpose. Some of Bin Ladin's associates later took credit.<sup>47</sup>

In June 1996, an enormous truck bomb detonated in the Khobar Towers residential complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, that housed U.S. Air Force personnel. Nineteen Americans were killed, and 372 were wounded. The operation was carried out principally, perhaps exclusively, by Saudi Hezbollah, an organization that had received support from the government of Iran. While the evidence of Iranian involvement is strong, there are also signs that al Qaeda played some role, as yet unknown.<sup>48</sup>

In this period, other prominent attacks in which Bin Ladin's involvement is at best cloudy are the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, a plot that same year to destroy landmarks in New York, and the 1995 Manila air plot to blow up a dozen U.S. airliners over the Pacific. Details on these plots appear in chapter 3.

Another scheme revealed that Bin Ladin sought the capability to kill on a mass scale. His business aides received word that a Sudanese military officer who had been a member of the previous government cabinet was offering to sell weapons-grade uranium. After a number of contacts were made through intermediaries, the officer set the price at \$1.5 million, which did not deter Bin Ladin. Al Qaeda representatives asked to inspect the uranium and were shown a cylinder about 3 feet long, and one thought he could pronounce it genuine. Al Qaeda apparently purchased the cylinder, then discovered it to be bogus.<sup>49</sup> But while the effort failed, it shows what Bin Ladin and his associates hoped to do. One of the al Qaeda representatives explained his mission: "it's easy to kill more people with uranium."<sup>50</sup>

Bin Ladin seemed willing to include in the confederation terrorists from

almost every corner of the Muslim world. His vision mirrored that of Sudan's Islamist leader, Turabi, who convened a series of meetings under the label Popular Arab and Islamic Conference around the time of Bin Ladin's arrival in that country. Delegations of violent Islamist extremists came from all the groups represented in Bin Ladin's Islamic Army Shura. Representatives also came from organizations such as the Palestine Liberation Organization, Hamas, and Hezbollah.<sup>51</sup>

Turabi sought to persuade Shiites and Sunnis to put aside their divisions and join against the common enemy. In late 1991 or 1992, discussions in Sudan between al Qaeda and Iranian operatives led to an informal agreement to cooperate in providing support—even if only training—for actions carried out primarily against Israel and the United States. Not long afterward, senior al Qaeda operatives and trainers traveled to Iran to receive training in explosives. In the fall of 1993, another such delegation went to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon for further training in explosives as well as in intelligence and security. Bin Ladin reportedly showed particular interest in learning how to use truck bombs such as the one that had killed 241 U.S. Marines in Lebanon in 1983. The relationship between al Qaeda and Iran demonstrated that Sunni-Shia divisions did not necessarily pose an insurmountable barrier to cooperation in terrorist operations. As will be described in chapter 7, al Qaeda contacts with Iran continued in ensuing years.<sup>52</sup>

Bin Ladin was also willing to explore possibilities for cooperation with Iraq, even though Iraq's dictator, Saddam Hussein, had never had an Islamist agenda—save for his opportunistic pose as a defender of the faithful against “Crusaders” during the Gulf War of 1991. Moreover, Bin Ladin had in fact been sponsoring anti-Saddam Islamists in Iraqi Kurdistan, and sought to attract them into his Islamic army.<sup>53</sup>

To protect his own ties with Iraq, Turabi reportedly brokered an agreement that Bin Ladin would stop supporting activities against Saddam. Bin Ladin apparently honored this pledge, at least for a time, although he continued to aid a group of Islamist extremists operating in part of Iraq (Kurdistan) outside of Baghdad's control. In the late 1990s, these extremist groups suffered major defeats by Kurdish forces. In 2001, with Bin Ladin's help they re-formed into an organization called Ansar al Islam. There are indications that by then the Iraqi regime tolerated and may even have helped Ansar al Islam against the common Kurdish enemy.<sup>54</sup>

With the Sudanese regime acting as intermediary, Bin Ladin himself met with a senior Iraqi intelligence officer in Khartoum in late 1994 or early 1995. Bin Ladin is said to have asked for space to establish training camps, as well as assistance in procuring weapons, but there is no evidence that Iraq responded to this request.<sup>55</sup> As described below, the ensuing years saw additional efforts to establish connections.

### **Sudan Becomes a Doubtful Haven**

Not until 1998 did al Qaeda undertake a major terrorist operation of its own, in large part because Bin Ladin lost his base in Sudan. Ever since the Islamist regime came to power in Khartoum, the United States and other Western governments had pressed it to stop providing a haven for terrorist organizations. Other governments in the region, such as those of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and even Libya, which were targets of some of these groups, added their own pressure. At the same time, the Sudanese regime began to change. Though Turabi had been its inspirational leader, General Omar al Bashir, president since 1989, had never been entirely under his thumb. Thus as outside pressures mounted, Bashir's supporters began to displace those of Turabi.

The attempted assassination in Ethiopia of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in June 1995 appears to have been a tipping point. The would-be killers, who came from the Egyptian Islamic Group, had been sheltered in Sudan and helped by Bin Ladin.<sup>56</sup> When the Sudanese refused to hand over three individuals identified as involved in the assassination plot, the UN Security Council passed a resolution criticizing their inaction and eventually sanctioned Khartoum in April 1996.<sup>57</sup>

A clear signal to Bin Ladin that his days in Sudan were numbered came when the government advised him that it intended to yield to Libya's demands to stop giving sanctuary to its enemies. Bin Ladin had to tell the Libyans who had been part of his Islamic army that he could no longer protect them and that they had to leave the country. Outraged, several Libyan members of al Qaeda and the Islamic Army Shura renounced all connections with him.<sup>58</sup>

Bin Ladin also began to have serious money problems. International pressure on Sudan, together with strains in the world economy, hurt Sudan's currency. Some of Bin Ladin's companies ran short of funds. As Sudanese authorities became less obliging, normal costs of doing business increased. Saudi pressures on the Bin Ladin family also probably took some toll. In any case, Bin Ladin found it necessary both to cut back his spending and to control his outlays more closely. He appointed a new financial manager, whom his followers saw as miserly.<sup>59</sup>

Money problems proved costly to Bin Ladin in other ways. Jamal Ahmed al Fadl, a Sudanese-born Arab, had spent time in the United States and had been recruited for the Afghan war through the Farouq mosque in Brooklyn. He had joined al Qaeda and taken the oath of fealty to Bin Ladin, serving as one of his business agents. Then Bin Ladin discovered that Fadl had skimmed about \$110,000, and he asked for restitution. Fadl resented receiving a salary of only \$500 a month while some of the Egyptians in al Qaeda were given \$1,200 a month. He defected and became a star informant for the United States. Also testifying about al Qaeda in a U.S. court was L'Houssaine Kherchtou, who told of breaking with Bin Ladin because of Bin Ladin's professed inability to provide him with money when his wife needed a caesarian section.<sup>60</sup>

In February 1996, Sudanese officials began approaching officials from the



United States and other governments, asking what actions of theirs might ease foreign pressure. In secret meetings with Saudi officials, Sudan offered to expel Bin Ladin to Saudi Arabia and asked the Saudis to pardon him. U.S. officials became aware of these secret discussions, certainly by March. Saudi officials apparently wanted Bin Ladin expelled from Sudan. They had already revoked his citizenship, however, and would not tolerate his presence in their country. And Bin Ladin may have no longer felt safe in Sudan, where he had already escaped at least one assassination attempt that he believed to have been the work of the Egyptian or Saudi regimes, or both. In any case, on May 19, 1996, Bin Ladin left Sudan—significantly weakened, despite his ambitions and organizational skills. He returned to Afghanistan.<sup>61</sup>

## 2.5 AL QAEDA'S RENEWAL IN AFGHANISTAN (1996–1998)

Bin Ladin flew on a leased aircraft from Khartoum to Jalalabad, with a refueling stopover in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>62</sup> He was accompanied by family members and bodyguards, as well as by al Qaeda members who had been close associates since his organization's 1988 founding in Afghanistan. Dozens of additional militants arrived on later flights.<sup>63</sup>

Though Bin Ladin's destination was Afghanistan, Pakistan was the nation that held the key to his ability to use Afghanistan as a base from which to revive his ambitious enterprise for war against the United States.

For the first quarter century of its existence as a nation, Pakistan's identity had derived from Islam, but its politics had been decidedly secular. The army was—and remains—the country's strongest and most respected institution, and the army had been and continues to be preoccupied with its rivalry with India, especially over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

From the 1970s onward, religion had become an increasingly powerful force in Pakistani politics. After a coup in 1977, military leaders turned to Islamist groups for support, and fundamentalists became more prominent. South Asia had an indigenous form of Islamic fundamentalism, which had developed in the nineteenth century at a school in the Indian village of Deoband.<sup>64</sup> The influence of the Wahhabi school of Islam had also grown, nurtured by Saudi-funded institutions. Moreover, the fighting in Afghanistan made Pakistan home to an enormous—and generally unwelcome—population of Afghan refugees; and since the badly strained Pakistani education system could not accommodate the refugees, the government increasingly let privately funded religious schools serve as a cost-free alternative. Over time, these schools produced large numbers of half-educated young men with no marketable skills but with deeply held Islamic views.<sup>65</sup>

Pakistan's rulers found these multitudes of ardent young Afghans a source



of potential trouble at home but potentially useful abroad. Those who joined the Taliban movement, espousing a ruthless version of Islamic law, perhaps could bring order in chaotic Afghanistan and make it a cooperative ally. They thus might give Pakistan greater security on one of the several borders where Pakistani military officers hoped for what they called “strategic depth.”<sup>66</sup>

It is unlikely that Bin Ladin could have returned to Afghanistan had Pakistan disapproved. The Pakistani military intelligence service probably had advance knowledge of his coming, and its officers may have facilitated his travel. During his entire time in Sudan, he had maintained guesthouses and training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan. These were part of a larger network used by diverse organizations for recruiting and training fighters for Islamic insurgencies in such places as Tajikistan, Kashmir, and Chechnya. Pakistani intelligence officers reportedly introduced Bin Ladin to Taliban leaders in Kandahar, their main base of power, to aid his reassertion of control over camps near

Khowst, out of an apparent hope that he would now expand the camps and make them available for training Kashmiri militants.<sup>67</sup>

Yet Bin Ladin was in his weakest position since his early days in the war against the Soviet Union. The Sudanese government had canceled the registration of the main business enterprises he had set up there and then put some of them up for public sale. According to a senior al Qaeda detainee, the government of Sudan seized everything Bin Ladin had possessed there.<sup>68</sup>

He also lost the head of his military committee, Abu Ubaidah al Banshiri, one of the most capable and popular leaders of al Qaeda. While most of the group's key figures had accompanied Bin Ladin to Afghanistan, Banshiri had remained in Kenya to oversee the training and weapons shipments of the cell set up some four years earlier. He died in a ferryboat accident on Lake Victoria just a few days after Bin Ladin arrived in Jalalabad, leaving Bin Ladin with a need to replace him not only in the Shura but also as supervisor of the cells and prospective operations in East Africa.<sup>69</sup> He had to make other adjustments as well, for some al Qaeda members viewed Bin Ladin's return to Afghanistan as occasion to go off in their own directions. Some maintained collaborative relationships with al Qaeda, but many disengaged entirely.<sup>70</sup>

For a time, it may not have been clear to Bin Ladin that the Taliban would be his best bet as an ally. When he arrived in Afghanistan, they controlled much of the country, but key centers, including Kabul, were still held by rival warlords. Bin Ladin went initially to Jalalabad, probably because it was in an area controlled by a provincial council of Islamic leaders who were not major contenders for national power. He found lodgings with Younis Khalis, the head of one of the main mujahideen factions. Bin Ladin apparently kept his options open, maintaining contacts with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who, though an Islamic extremist, was also one of the Taliban's most militant opponents. But after September 1996, when first Jalalabad and then Kabul fell to the Taliban, Bin Ladin cemented his ties with them.<sup>71</sup>

That process did not always go smoothly. Bin Ladin, no longer constrained by the Sudanese, clearly thought that he had new freedom to publish his appeals for jihad. At about the time when the Taliban were making their final drive toward Jalalabad and Kabul, Bin Ladin issued his August 1996 fatwa, saying that "We . . . have been prevented from addressing the Muslims," but expressing relief that "by the grace of Allah, a safe base here is now available in the high Hindu Kush mountains in Khurasan." But the Taliban, like the Sudanese, would eventually hear warnings, including from the Saudi monarchy.<sup>72</sup>

Though Bin Ladin had promised Taliban leaders that he would be circumspect, he broke this promise almost immediately, giving an inflammatory interview to CNN in March 1997. The Taliban leader Mullah Omar promptly "invited" Bin Ladin to move to Kandahar, ostensibly in the interests of Bin Ladin's own security but more likely to situate him where he might be easier to control.<sup>73</sup>

There is also evidence that around this time Bin Ladin sent out a number of feelers to the Iraqi regime, offering some cooperation. None are reported to have received a significant response. According to one report, Saddam Hussein's efforts at this time to rebuild relations with the Saudis and other Middle Eastern regimes led him to stay clear of Bin Ladin.<sup>74</sup>

In mid-1998, the situation reversed; it was Iraq that reportedly took the initiative. In March 1998, after Bin Ladin's public fatwa against the United States, two al Qaeda members reportedly went to Iraq to meet with Iraqi intelligence. In July, an Iraqi delegation traveled to Afghanistan to meet first with the Taliban and then with Bin Ladin. Sources reported that one, or perhaps both, of these meetings was apparently arranged through Bin Ladin's Egyptian deputy, Zawahiri, who had ties of his own to the Iraqis. In 1998, Iraq was under intensifying U.S. pressure, which culminated in a series of large air attacks in December.<sup>75</sup>

Similar meetings between Iraqi officials and Bin Ladin or his aides may have occurred in 1999 during a period of some reported strains with the Taliban. According to the reporting, Iraqi officials offered Bin Ladin a safe haven in Iraq. Bin Ladin declined, apparently judging that his circumstances in Afghanistan remained more favorable than the Iraqi alternative. The reports describe friendly contacts and indicate some common themes in both sides' hatred of the United States. But to date we have seen no evidence that these or the earlier contacts ever developed into a collaborative operational relationship. Nor have we seen evidence indicating that Iraq cooperated with al Qaeda in developing or carrying out any attacks against the United States.<sup>76</sup>

Bin Ladin eventually enjoyed a strong financial position in Afghanistan, thanks to Saudi and other financiers associated with the Golden Chain. Through his relationship with Mullah Omar—and the monetary and other benefits that it brought the Taliban—Bin Ladin was able to circumvent restrictions; Mullah Omar would stand by him even when other Taliban leaders raised objections. Bin Ladin appeared to have in Afghanistan a freedom of movement that he had lacked in Sudan. Al Qaeda members could travel freely within the country, enter and exit it without visas or any immigration procedures, purchase and import vehicles and weapons, and enjoy the use of official Afghan Ministry of Defense license plates. Al Qaeda also used the Afghan state-owned Ariana Airlines to courier money into the country.<sup>77</sup>

The Taliban seemed to open the doors to all who wanted to come to Afghanistan to train in the camps. The alliance with the Taliban provided al Qaeda a sanctuary in which to train and indoctrinate fighters and terrorists, import weapons, forge ties with other jihad groups and leaders, and plot and staff terrorist schemes. While Bin Ladin maintained his own al Qaeda guesthouses and camps for vetting and training recruits, he also provided support to and bene-

fited from the broad infrastructure of such facilities in Afghanistan made available to the global network of Islamist movements. U.S. intelligence estimates put the total number of fighters who underwent instruction in Bin Ladin–supported camps in Afghanistan from 1996 through 9/11 at 10,000 to 20,000.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to training fighters and special operators, this larger network of guesthouses and camps provided a mechanism by which al Qaeda could screen and vet candidates for induction into its own organization. Thousands flowed through the camps, but no more than a few hundred seem to have become al Qaeda members. From the time of its founding, al Qaeda had employed training and indoctrination to identify “worthy” candidates.<sup>79</sup>

Al Qaeda continued meanwhile to collaborate closely with the many Middle Eastern groups—in Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Somalia, and elsewhere—with which it had been linked when Bin Ladin was in Sudan. It also reinforced its London base and its other offices around Europe, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. Bin Ladin bolstered his links to extremists in South and Southeast Asia, including the Malaysian-Indonesian JI and several Pakistani groups engaged in the Kashmir conflict.<sup>80</sup>

The February 1998 fatwa thus seems to have been a kind of public launch of a renewed and stronger al Qaeda, after a year and a half of work. Having rebuilt his fund-raising network, Bin Ladin had again become the rich man of the jihad movement. He had maintained or restored many of his links with terrorists elsewhere in the world. And he had strengthened the internal ties in his own organization.

The inner core of al Qaeda continued to be a hierarchical top-down group with defined positions, tasks, and salaries. Most but not all in this core swore fealty (or *bayat*) to Bin Ladin. Other operatives were committed to Bin Ladin or to his goals and would take assignments for him, but they did not swear bayat and maintained, or tried to maintain, some autonomy. A looser circle of adherents might give money to al Qaeda or train in its camps but remained essentially independent. Nevertheless, they constituted a potential resource for al Qaeda.<sup>81</sup>

Now effectively merged with Zawahiri’s Egyptian Islamic Jihad,<sup>82</sup> al Qaeda promised to become the general headquarters for international terrorism, without the need for the Islamic Army Shura. Bin Ladin was prepared to pick up where he had left off in Sudan. He was ready to strike at “the head of the snake.”

Al Qaeda’s role in organizing terrorist operations had also changed. Before the move to Afghanistan, it had concentrated on providing funds, training, and weapons for actions carried out by members of allied groups. The attacks on the U.S. embassies in East Africa in the summer of 1998 would take a different form—planned, directed, and executed by al Qaeda, under the direct supervision of Bin Ladin and his chief aides.

### **The Embassy Bombings**

As early as December 1993, a team of al Qaeda operatives had begun casing targets in Nairobi for future attacks. It was led by Ali Mohamed, a former Egyptian army officer who had moved to the United States in the mid-1980s, enlisted in the U.S. Army, and became an instructor at Fort Bragg. He had provided guidance and training to extremists at the Farouq mosque in Brooklyn, including some who were subsequently convicted in the February 1993 attack on the World Trade Center. The casing team also included a computer expert whose write-ups were reviewed by al Qaeda leaders.<sup>83</sup>

The team set up a makeshift laboratory for developing their surveillance photographs in an apartment in Nairobi where the various al Qaeda operatives and leaders based in or traveling to the Kenya cell sometimes met. Bانشiri, al Qaeda's military committee chief, continued to be the operational commander of the cell; but because he was constantly on the move, Bin Ladin had dispatched another operative, Khaled al Fawwaz, to serve as the on-site manager. The technical surveillance and communications equipment employed for these casing missions included state-of-the-art video cameras obtained from China and from dealers in Germany. The casing team also reconnoitered targets in Djibouti.<sup>84</sup>

As early as January 1994, Bin Ladin received the surveillance reports, complete with diagrams prepared by the team's computer specialist. He, his top military committee members—Bانشiri and his deputy, Abu Hafs al Masri (also known as Mohammed Atef)—and a number of other al Qaeda leaders reviewed the reports. Agreeing that the U.S. embassy in Nairobi was an easy target because a car bomb could be parked close by, they began to form a plan. Al Qaeda had begun developing the tactical expertise for such attacks months earlier, when some of its operatives—top military committee members and several operatives who were involved with the Kenya cell among them—were sent to Hezbollah training camps in Lebanon.<sup>85</sup>

The cell in Kenya experienced a series of disruptions that may in part account for the relatively long delay before the attack was actually carried out. The difficulties Bin Ladin began to encounter in Sudan in 1995, his move to Afghanistan in 1996, and the months spent establishing ties with the Taliban may also have played a role, as did Bانشiri's accidental drowning.

In August 1997, the Kenya cell panicked. The London *Daily Telegraph* reported that Madani al Tayyib, formerly head of al Qaeda's finance committee, had turned himself over to the Saudi government. The article said (incorrectly) that the Saudis were sharing Tayyib's information with the U.S. and British authorities.<sup>86</sup> At almost the same time, cell members learned that U.S. and Kenyan agents had searched the Kenya residence of Wadi al Hage, who had become the new on-site manager in Nairobi, and that Hage's telephone was being tapped. Hage was a U.S. citizen who had worked with Bin Ladin in Afgha-

nistan in the 1980s, and in 1992 he went to Sudan to become one of al Qaeda's major financial operatives. When Hage returned to the United States to appear before a grand jury investigating Bin Ladin, the job of cell manager was taken over by Harun Fazul, a Kenyan citizen who had been in Bin Ladin's advance team to Sudan back in 1990. Harun faxed a report on the "security situation" to several sites, warning that "the crew members in East Africa is [sic] in grave danger" in part because "America knows . . . that the followers of [Bin Ladin] . . . carried out the operations to hit Americans in Somalia." The report provided instructions for avoiding further exposure.<sup>87</sup>

On February 23, 1998, Bin Ladin issued his public fatwa. The language had been in negotiation for some time, as part of the merger under way between Bin Ladin's organization and Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Less than a month after the publication of the fatwa, the teams that were to carry out the embassy attacks were being pulled together in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The timing and content of their instructions indicate that the decision to launch the attacks had been made by the time the fatwa was issued.<sup>88</sup>

The next four months were spent setting up the teams in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Members of the cells rented residences, and purchased bomb-making materials and transport vehicles. At least one additional explosives expert was brought in to assist in putting the weapons together. In Nairobi, a hotel room was rented to put up some of the operatives. The suicide trucks were purchased shortly before the attack date.<sup>89</sup>

While this was taking place, Bin Ladin continued to push his public message. On May 7, the deputy head of al Qaeda's military committee, Mohammed Atef, faxed to Bin Ladin's London office a new fatwa issued by a group of sheikhs located in Afghanistan. A week later, it appeared in *Al Quds al Arabi*, the same Arabic-language newspaper in London that had first published Bin Ladin's February fatwa, and it conveyed the same message—the duty of Muslims to carry out holy war against the enemies of Islam and to expel the Americans from the Gulf region. Two weeks after that, Bin Ladin gave a videotaped interview to ABC News with the same slogans, adding that "we do not differentiate between those dressed in military uniforms and civilians; they are all targets in this *fatwa*."<sup>90</sup>

By August 1, members of the cells not directly involved in the attacks had mostly departed from East Africa. The remaining operatives prepared and assembled the bombs, and acquired the delivery vehicles. On August 4, they made one last casing run at the embassy in Nairobi. By the evening of August 6, all but the delivery teams and one or two persons assigned to remove the evidence trail had left East Africa. Back in Afghanistan, Bin Ladin and the al Qaeda leadership had left Kandahar for the countryside, expecting U.S. retaliation. Declarations taking credit for the attacks had already been faxed to the joint al Qaeda–Egyptian Islamic Jihad office in Baku, with instructions to stand by

for orders to “instantly” transmit them to *Al Quds al Arabi*. One proclaimed “the formation of the Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Places,” and two others—one for each embassy—announced that the attack had been carried out by a “company” of a “battalion” of this “Islamic Army.”<sup>91</sup>

On the morning of August 7, the bomb-laden trucks drove into the embassies roughly five minutes apart—about 10:35 A.M. in Nairobi and 10:39 A.M. in Dar es Salaam. Shortly afterward, a phone call was placed from Baku to London. The previously prepared messages were then faxed to London.<sup>92</sup>

The attack on the U.S. embassy in Nairobi destroyed the embassy and killed 12 Americans and 201 others, almost all Kenyans. About 5,000 people were injured. The attack on the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam killed 11 more people, none of them Americans. Interviewed later about the deaths of the Africans, Bin Ladin answered that “when it becomes apparent that it would be impossible to repel these Americans without assaulting them, even if this involved the killing of Muslims, this is permissible under Islam.” Asked if he had indeed masterminded these bombings, Bin Ladin said that the World Islamic Front for jihad against “Jews and Crusaders” had issued a “crystal clear” fatwa. If the instigation for jihad against the Jews and the Americans to liberate the holy places “is considered a crime,” he said, “let history be a witness that I am a criminal.”<sup>93</sup>