**al-Qaeda**

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| **al-Qaeda القاعدة‎** | |
|  | |
| **Dates of operation** | August 11, 1988 – present |
| **Leader(s)** | [Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden) (1988–2011) [Ayman al-Zawahiri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayman_al-Zawahiri) (2011 – present) |
| **Active region(s)** | Worldwide |
| **Ideology** | [Sunni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunni) [Islamism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamism) Strict [sharia law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia_law) [Islamic fundamentalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_fundamentalism) [Takfiri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takfiri) [Pan-Islamism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-Islamism) [Worldwide Caliphate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldwide_Caliphate) [Qutbism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qutbism) [Wahhabism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahhabism) [Salafist Jihadism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salafist_Jihadism) |
| **Status** | Designated as [Foreign Terrorist Organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._State_Department_list_of_Foreign_Terrorist_Organizations) by the [U.S. State Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_State) Designated as [Proscribed Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism_Act_2000) by the UK [Home Office](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_Office) Designated as terrorist group by EU [Common Foreign and Security Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Foreign_and_Security_Policy) Under the [Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unlawful_Activities_(Prevention)_Act) designated as [terrorist organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorist_organization) by the [Government of India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_India) |
| **Size** | 500–1,000 operatives |

**al-Qaeda** (pron.: [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ælˈkaɪdə](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English) [*al-****KY****-də*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Pronunciation_respelling_key); [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): القاعدة‎ *al-qāʿidah*, Arabic: [[ælqɑːʕɪdɐ]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:IPA_for_Arabic), translation: "The Base" and alternatively spelled **al-Qaida** and sometimes **al-Qa'ida**) is a global [militant Islamist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Militant_Islamist) organization founded by [Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden) at some point between August 1988 and late 1989, with its [origins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda#History) being traceable to the [Soviet War in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_War_in_Afghanistan). It operates as a network comprising both a multinational, stateless armyand a radical [Sunni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunni) Muslim movement calling for global [Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jihad) and a strict interpretation of [sharia law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia_law). It has been designated as a [terrorist organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorist_organization) by the [United Nations Security Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council), [NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO), the [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union), the United Kingdom, the United States, and various other countries (see [below](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda#Designation_as_terrorist_organization#Designation_as_terrorist_organization)). Al-Qaeda has carried out several attacks on non-Muslims, and other targets it considers [*kafir*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kafir).

Al-Qaeda has attacked civilian and military targets in various countries. For example, it carried out the [September 11 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks), [1998 U.S. embassy bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_U.S._embassy_bombings) and the [2002 Bali bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2002_Bali_bombings). The U.S. government responded to the September 11 attacks by launching the [War on Terror](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terror). With the loss of key leaders, culminating in the death of [Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden), al-Qaeda's operations have devolved from actions that were controlled from the top-down, to actions by franchise associated groups, to actions of lone wolf operators.

Characteristic techniques employed by al-Qaeda include [suicide attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_attack) and simultaneous bombings of different targets. Activities ascribed to it may involve members of the movement, who have taken a pledge of loyalty to Osama bin Laden, or the much more numerous "al-Qaeda-linked" individuals who have undergone training in one of its camps in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq or Sudan, but who have not taken any pledge. Al-Qaeda ideologues envision a complete break from all foreign influences in [Muslim countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_world), and the creation of a new world-wide Islamic [caliphate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate#Re-establishment_of_the_Caliphate). Among the beliefs ascribed to Al-Qaeda members is the conviction that a Christian–Jewish alliance is conspiring to destroy Islam. As [Salafist jihadists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salafist_jihadism), they believe that the killing of civilians is religiously sanctioned, and they ignore any aspect of religious scripture which might be interpreted as forbidding the murder of civilians and internecine fighting. Al-Qaeda also opposes [man-made laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man-made_law), and wants to replace them with a strict form of [sharia law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia_law).

Al-Qaeda is also responsible for instigating [sectarian violence among Muslims](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sectarian_violence_among_Muslims). Al-Qaeda is intolerant of non-Sunni branches of Islam and denounces them by means of [excommunications](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excommunication) called "[takfir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takfir)". Al-Qaeda leaders regard [liberal Muslims](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_movements_within_Islam), [Shias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia), [Sufis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufi) and other sects as heretics and have attacked their mosques and gatherings. Examples of sectarian attacks include the [Yazidi community bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Yazidi_communities_bombings), the [Sadr City bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/November_23,_2006_Sadr_City_bombings), the [Ashoura Massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashoura_Massacre) and the [April 2007 Baghdad bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/April_18,_2007_Baghdad_bombings).

**Organization**

Al-Qaeda's management philosophy has been described as "centralization of decision and decentralization of execution." It is thought that al-Qaeda's leadership, following the [War on Terror](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terror), has "become geographically isolated", leading to the "emergence of decentralized leadership" of regional groups using the al-Qaeda "brand".

Many terrorism experts do not believe that the global jihadist movement is driven at every level by al-Qaeda's leadership. Although bin Laden still held considerable ideological sway over some Muslim extremists before his death, experts argue that al-Qaeda has fragmented over the years into a variety of regional movements that have little connection with one another. [Marc Sageman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Sageman), a psychiatrist and former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer, said that al-Qaeda is now just a "loose label for a movement that seems to target the West". "There is no umbrella organization. We like to create a mythical entity called [al-Qaeda] in our minds, but that is not the reality we are dealing with."

This view mirrors the account given by Osama bin Laden in his October 2001 interview with [Tayseer Allouni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tayseer_Allouni):

"...this matter isn't about any specific person and...is not about the al-Qai`dah Organization. We are the children of an Islamic Nation, with Prophet Muhammad as its leader, our Lord is one...and all the true believers [mu'mineen] are brothers. So the situation isn't like the West portrays it, that there is an 'organization' with a specific name (such as 'al-Qai`dah') and so on. That particular name is very old. It was born without any intention from us. Brother Abu Ubaida... created a military base to train the young men to fight against the vicious, arrogant, brutal, terrorizing Soviet empire... So this place was called 'The Base' ['Al-Qai`dah'], as in a training base, so this name grew and became. We aren't separated from this nation. We are the children of a nation, and we are an inseparable part of it, and from those public demonstrations which spread from the far east, from the Philippines, to Indonesia, to Malaysia, to India, to Pakistan, reaching Mauritania... and so we discuss the conscience of this nation."

Others, however, see al-Qaeda as an integrated network that is strongly led from the Pakistani tribal areas and has a powerful strategic purpose. [Bruce Hoffman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Hoffman), a terrorism expert at [Georgetown University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgetown_University), said "It amazes me that people don't think there is a clear adversary out there, and that our adversary does not have a strategic approach."

Al-Qaeda has the following direct affiliates:

* [Al-Qaeda in Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_Iraq)
* [Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_Organization_in_the_Islamic_Maghreb)
* [Al-Shabaab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Shabaab) (Mujahideen Youth Movement) in Somalia
* [Egyptian Islamic Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Islamic_Jihad)
* [Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_the_Arabian_Peninsula), which comprises
  + [Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Qaeda_in_Saudi_Arabia), and
  + [Islamic Jihad of Yemen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Jihad_of_Yemen)

**Leadership**



[Pakistani](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan) journalist [Hamid Mir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamid_Mir) interviewing then al-Qaeda leader [Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden) in Afghanistan, in 1997

Information mostly acquired from [Jamal al-Fadl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamal_al-Fadl) provided American authorities with a rough picture of how the group was organized. While the veracity of the information provided by al-Fadl and the motivation for his cooperation are both disputed, American authorities base much of their current knowledge of al-Qaeda on his testimony.

[Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden) was the most historically notable [emir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emir), or commander, and Senior Operations Chief of al-Qaida prior to his assassination on May 1, 2011 by US forces. [Ayman al-Zawahiri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayman_al-Zawahiri), al-Qaeda's Deputy Operations Chief prior to bin Laden's death, assumed the role of commander, according to an announcement by al-Qaida on June 16, 2011. He replaced [Saif al-Adel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saif_al-Adel), who had served as interim commander.

Bin Laden was advised by a [Shura Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shura_Council), which consists of senior al-Qaeda members, estimated by Western officials to consist of 20–30 people.

[Atiyah Abd al-Rahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atiyah_Abd_al-Rahman) was alleged to be second in command prior to his death on August 22, 2011.

On 5 June 2012, Pakistan intelligence officials announced that al-Rahman's replacement [Abu Yahya al-Libi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Yahya_al-Libi) had been killed in Pakistan.

Al-Qaeda's network was built from scratch as a conspiratorial network that draws on leaders of all its regional nodes "as and when necessary to serve as an integral part of its high command."

* The Military Committee is responsible for training operatives, acquiring weapons, and planning attacks.
* The Money/Business Committee funds the recruitment and training of operatives through the [*hawala*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawala) banking system. U.S-led efforts to eradicate the sources of [terrorist financing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorist_financing) were most successful in the year immediately following the September 11 attacks; al-Qaeda continues to operate through unregulated banks, such as the 1,000 or so *hawaladars* in Pakistan, some of which can handle deals of up to $10 million. It also provides air tickets and false passports, pays al-Qaeda members, and oversees profit-driven businesses. In the [9/11 Commission Report](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9/11_Commission_Report)*, it was estimated that al-Qaeda required $30 million-per-year to conduct its operations.*
* The Law Committee reviews [Sharia law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia_law), and decides whether particular courses of action conform to it.
* The Islamic Study/[*Fatwah*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatw%C4%81) Committee issues religious edicts, such as an edict in 1998 telling Muslims to kill Americans.
* In the late 1990s there was a publicly known Media Committee, which ran the now-defunct newspaper *Nashrat al Akhbar (Newscast)* and handled [public relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_relations).
* In 2005, al-Qaeda formed [As-Sahab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As-Sahab), a media production house, to supply its video and audio materials.

**Command structure**

When asked about the possibility of al-Qaeda's connection to the [July 7, 2005 London bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_7,_2005_London_bombings) in 2005, [Metropolitan Police Commissioner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolitan_Police_Commissioner) [Sir Ian Blair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Ian_Blair) said: "Al-Qaeda is not an organization. Al-Qaeda is a way of working ... but this has the hallmark of that approach ... al-Qaeda clearly has the ability to provide training ... to provide expertise ... and I think that is what has occurred here."

On August 13, 2005, however, [*The Independent*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Independent) newspaper, quoting police and [MI5](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MI5) investigations, reported that the July 7 bombers had acted independently of an al-Qaeda terror mastermind someplace abroad.

What exactly al-Qaeda is, or was, remains in dispute. Author and journalist [Adam Curtis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Curtis) argues that the idea of al-Qaeda as a formal organization is primarily an American invention. Curtis contends the name "al-Qaeda" was first brought to the attention of the public in the 2001 trial of bin Laden and the four men accused of the [1998 US embassy bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_US_embassy_bombings) in East Africa:

The reality was that bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri had become the focus of a loose association of disillusioned Islamist militants who were attracted by the new strategy. But there was no organization. These were militants who mostly planned their own operations and looked to bin Laden for funding and assistance. He was not their commander. There is also no evidence that bin Laden used the term "al-Qaeda" to refer to the name of a group until after September 11 attacks, when he realized that this was the term the Americans had given it.

As a matter of law, the [US Department of Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Justice) needed to show that bin Laden was the leader of a criminal organization in order to charge him [*in absentia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_absentia) under the [Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racketeer_Influenced_and_Corrupt_Organizations_Act), also known as the RICO statutes. The name of the organization and details of its structure were provided in the testimony of [Jamal al-Fadl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamal_al-Fadl), who said he was a founding member of the organization and a former employee of bin Laden. Questions about the reliability of al-Fadl's testimony have been raised by a number of sources because of his history of dishonesty, and because he was delivering it as part of a [plea bargain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plea_bargain) agreement after being convicted of conspiring to attack U.S. military establishments. Sam Schmidt, one of his defense lawyers, said:

There were selective portions of al-Fadl's testimony that I believe was false, to help support the picture that he helped the Americans join together. I think he lied in a number of specific testimony about a unified image of what this organization was. It made al-Qaeda the new Mafia or the new Communists. It made them identifiable as a group and therefore made it easier to prosecute any person associated with al-Qaeda for any acts or statements made by bin Laden.

**Field operatives**

The number of individuals in the organization who have undergone proper military training, and are capable of commanding insurgent forces, is largely unknown. In 2006, it was estimated that al-Qaeda had several thousand commanders embedded in 40 different countries As of 2009, it was believed that no more than 200–300 members were still active commanders.

According to the award-winning 2004 BBC documentary [*The Power of Nightmares*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Power_of_Nightmares), al-Qaeda was so weakly linked together that it was hard to say it existed apart from bin Laden and a small clique of close associates. The lack of any significant numbers of convicted al-Qaeda members, despite a large number of arrests on terrorism charges, was cited by the documentary as a reason to doubt whether a widespread entity that met the description of al-Qaeda existed.

**Insurgent forces**

According to [Robert Cassidy](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Robert_Cassidy&action=edit&redlink=1), al-Qaeda controls two separate forces deployed alongside insurgents in Iraq and Pakistan. The first, numbering in the tens of thousands, was "organized, trained, and equipped as insurgent combat forces" in the Soviet-Afghan war. It was made up primarily of foreign *mujahideen* from Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Many went on to fight in Bosnia and Somalia for global *jihad*. Another group, approximately 10,000 strong, live in Western states and have received rudimentary combat training.

Other analysts have described al-Qaeda's rank and file as being "predominantly Arab," in its first years of operation, and now also includes "other peoples" as of 2007. It has been estimated that 62% of al-Qaeda members have university education.

**Financing**

Some financing for al-Qaeda in the 1990s came from the personal wealth of Osama bin Laden. By 2001 Afghanistan had become politically complex and mired. With many financial sources for al-Qaeda Bin Laden's financing role may have become comparatively minor. Sources in 2001 could also have included [Jamaa Al-Islamiyya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Gama%27a_al-Islamiyya) and [Islamic Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Islamic_Jihad), both associated with Afghan-based Egyptians. Other sources of income in 2001 included the [heroin trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heroin_trade) and donations from supporters in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries. A [WikiLeaks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks) released memo from the United States Secretary of State sent in 2009 asserted that the primary source of funding of Sunni terrorist groups worldwide was Saudi Arabia.

**Strategy**

On March 11, 2005, [*Al-Quds Al-Arabi*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Quds_Al-Arabi) published extracts from [Saif al-Adel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saif_al-Adel)'s document "Al Quaeda's Strategy to the Year 2020". [Abdel Bari Atwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdel_Bari_Atwan) summarizes this strategy as comprising five stages to rid the [Ummah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ummah) from all forms of oppression:

1. Provoke the United States and the West into invading a Muslim country by staging a massive attack or string of attacks on U.S. soil that results in massive civilian casualties.
2. Incite local resistance to occupying forces.
3. Expand the conflict to neighboring countries, and engage the U.S. and its allies in a long war of attrition.
4. Convert al-Qaeda into an ideology and set of operating principles that can be loosely franchised in other countries without requiring direct command and control, and via these franchises incite attacks against the U.S. and countries allied with the U.S. until they withdraw from the conflict, as happened with the [2004 Madrid train bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Madrid_train_bombings), but which did not have the same effect with the [July 7, 2005 London bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_7,_2005_London_bombings).
5. The U.S. economy will finally collapse by the year 2020 under the strain of multiple engagements in numerous places, making the worldwide economic system which is dependent on the U.S. also collapse leading to global political instability, which in turn leads to a global jihad led by al-Qaeda and a [Wahhabi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahhabi) [Caliphate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate) will then be installed across the world following the collapse of the U.S. and the rest of the Western world countries.

Atwan also noted, regarding the collapse of the U.S., "If this sounds far-fetched, it is sobering to consider that this virtually describes the [downfall of the Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_Soviet_Union)."

**Etymology**

In Arabic, *al-Qaeda* has four syllables (*al-qāʿidah*, Arabic pronunciation: [[ælˈqɑːʕɪdɐ]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:IPA_for_Arabic) or [[ælqɑːˈʕedæ]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:IPA_for_Arabic)). However, since two of the Arabic consonants in the name (the [voiceless uvular plosive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiceless_uvular_plosive) [q] and the [voiced pharyngeal fricative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiced_pharyngeal_fricative) [ʕ]) are not [phones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phone_(phonetics)) found in the English language, the closest naturalized [English pronunciations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_phonology) include [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ælˈkaɪdə](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English), [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ælˈkeɪdə](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English) and [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ˌælkɑːˈiːdə](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English). al-Qaeda's name can also be [transliterated](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transliteration) as al-Qaida, al-Qa'ida, el-Qaida, or al-Qaeda.

The name comes from the Arabic noun *qā'idah*, which means *foundation* or *basis*, and can also refer to a [military base](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_base). The initial *al-* is the Arabic [definite article](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_(grammar)) *the*, hence *the base*.

Bin Laden explained the origin of the term in a videotaped interview with [Al Jazeera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aljazeera) journalist [Tayseer Alouni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tayseer_Alouni) in October 2001:

The name 'al-Qaeda' was established a long time ago by mere chance. The late [Abu Ebeida El-Banashiri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ubaidah_al-Banshiri) established the training camps for our [*mujahedeen*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujahedeen) against Russia's terrorism. We used to call the training camp al-Qaeda. The name stayed.

It has been argued that two documents seized from the [Sarajevo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarajevo) office of the [Benevolence International Foundation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benevolence_International_Foundation) prove that the name was not simply adopted by the *mujahid* movement and that a group called al-Qaeda was established in August 1988. Both of these documents contain minutes of meetings held to establish a new military group, and contain the term "al-Qaeda".

Former British Foreign Secretary [Robin Cook](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_Cook) wrote that the word al-Qaeda should be translated as "the database", and originally referred to the computer file of the thousands of *mujahideen* militants who were recruited and trained with CIA help to defeat the Russians. In April 2002, the group assumed the name *Qa'idat al-Jihad*, which means "the base of Jihad". According to [Diaa Rashwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Ahram_Center_for_Political_and_Strategic_Studies), this was "apparently as a result of the merger of the overseas branch of Egypt's [al-Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Islamic_Jihad) (Egyptian Islamist Jihad, or EIJ) group, led by [Ayman al-Zawahiri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayman_al-Zawahiri), with the groups Bin Laden brought under his control after his return to Afghanistan in the mid-1990s."

**Ideology**

See also: [Qutbism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qutbism)

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| --- |
| Part of [a series](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Islamism) on |
| [Islamism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamism) |
| Basic topics   * [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam) * [Caliphate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate) * [History of Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam) * [Political aspects of Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_aspects_of_Islam) * [Islam and secularism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_secularism) * [Islamic economics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_economics) * [Islamic culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_culture) |
| Movements   * [All-India Muslim League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-India_Muslim_League) * [Muslim Brotherhood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood) * [Jamaat-e-Islami](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamaat-e-Islami) * [Hizb-ut-Tahrir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hizb-ut-Tahrir) * [Iranian Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Revolution) * [Islam Hadhari](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_Hadhari) * [Millî Görüş](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mill%C3%AE_G%C3%B6r%C3%BC%C5%9F) * [Salafism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salafi) * [Taliban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban) * [Hamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas) * [AKP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice_and_Development_Party_(Turkey)) * [List of Islamic democratic political parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Islamic_democratic_political_parties) |
| Manifestations   * [Islamization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamization) * [Islamic democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_democracy) * [Islamic fundamentalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_fundamentalism) * [Sex segregation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_segregation_in_Islam) * [Resistance movements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resistance_movement) * [Liberal movements within Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_movements_within_Islam) * [Islamic Modernism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Modernism) * [Islamic revival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_revival) * [Pan-Islamism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-Islamism) |
| Concepts   * [Khilafah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khilafah) * [Ummah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ummah) * [Sharia law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia_law) * [Shura](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shura) * [Ijma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ijma) * [Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jihad) |
| Key texts   * [*The Reconstruction of Religious* *Thought in Islam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Reconstruction_of_Religious_Thought_in_Islam) ([Iqbal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Iqbal)) * [*Milestones*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma%27alim_fi_al-Tariq) ([Qutb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid_Qutb)) * [*Islamic Government*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Government:_Governance_of_the_Jurist) ([Khomeini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruhollah_Khomeini)) |
| [**Islam Portal**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Islam)[Politics portal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Politics) |

The radical [Islamist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamist) movement in general and al-Qaeda in particular developed during the [Islamic revival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_revival) and [Islamist movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamism) of the last three decades of the 20th century, along with less extreme movements.

Some have argued that "without the writings" of Islamic author and thinker [Sayyid Qutb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid_Qutb), "al-Qaeda would not have existed." Qutb preached that because of the lack of [*sharia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia) law, the Muslim world was no longer Muslim, having reverted to pre-Islamic ignorance known as [*jahiliyyah*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jahiliyyah).

To restore Islam, he said a vanguard movement of righteous Muslims was needed to establish "true [Islamic states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_state)", implement *sharia*, and rid the Muslim world of any non-Muslim influences, such as concepts like socialism and nationalism. Enemies of Islam in Qutb's view included "treacherous Orientalists" and "world Jewry", who plotted "conspiracies" and "wicked[ly]" opposed Islam.

In the words of [Mohammed Jamal Khalifa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Jamal_Khalifa), a close college friend of bin Laden:

Islam is different from any other religion; it's a way of life. We [Khalifa and bin Laden] were trying to understand what Islam has to say about how we eat, who we marry, how we talk. We read Sayyid Qutb. He was the one who most affected our generation.

Qutb had an even greater influence on bin Laden's mentor and another leading member of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Zawahiri's uncle and maternal family patriarch, Mafouz Azzam, was Qutb's student, then protégé, then personal lawyer, and finally executor of his estate—one of the last people to see Qutb before his execution. "Young Ayman al-Zawahiri heard again and again from his beloved uncle Mahfouz about the purity of Qutb's character and the torment he had endured in prison." Zawahiri paid homage to Qutb in his work *Knights under the Prophet's Banner.*

One of the most powerful of Qutb's ideas was that many who said they were Muslims were not. Rather, they were [apostates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostate). That not only gave jihadists "a legal loophole around the prohibition of killing another Muslim," but made "it a religious obligation to execute" these self-professed Muslims. These alleged apostates included leaders of Muslim countries, since they failed to enforce *sharia* law.

**Religious compatibility**

[Abdel Bari Atwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdel_Bari_Atwan) writes that:

While the leadership's own theological platform is essentially [Salafi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salafi), the organization's umbrella is sufficiently wide to encompass various schools of thought and political leanings. Al-Qaeda counts among its members and supporters people associated with [Wahhabism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahhabism), [Shafi'ism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shafi%60i), [Malikism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maliki), and [Hanafism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanafi). There are even some whose beliefs and practices are directly at odds with Salafism, such as [Yunis Khalis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yunis_Khalis), one of the leaders of the Afghan mujahedin. He is a mystic who visits tombs of saints and seeks their blessings—practices inimical to bin Laden's Wahhabi-Salafi school of thought. The only exception to this pan-Islamic policy is [Shi'ism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shi%27ism). Al-Qaeda seems implacably opposed to it, as it holds Shi'ism to be heresy. In Iraq it has openly declared war on the [Badr Brigades](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badr_Brigades), who have fully cooperated with the US, and now considers even Shi'i civilians to be legitimate targets for acts of violence.

**History**

Researchershave described five distinct phases in the development of al-Qaeda: the beginning in the late 1980s, the "wilderness" period in 1990–96, its "heyday" in 1996–2001, the network period of 2001–05, and a period of fragmentation from 2005 to today.

**Jihad in Afghanistan**

Main articles: [Soviet war in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_war_in_Afghanistan) and [Islamic mujahid movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_mujahid_movement)



[CIA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Intelligence_Agency)-funded and [ISI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inter-Services_Intelligence)-trained Afghan [mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_mujahideen) fighters crossing the [Durand Line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durand_Line) border to fight Soviet forces and the Soviet-backed [Afghan government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Republic_of_Afghanistan) in 1985.

The origins of al-Qaeda as a network inspiring terrorism around the world and training operatives can be traced to the [Soviet War in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_War_in_Afghanistan) (December 1979 – February 1989). The U.S. viewed the conflict in Afghanistan, with the Afghan [Marxists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist) and allied Soviet troops on one side and the native Afghan *mujahideen*, some of whom were radical Islamic militants, on the other, as a blatant case of Soviet expansionism and aggression. A CIA program called [Operation Cyclone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Cyclone) channeled funds through Pakistan's [Inter-Services Intelligence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inter-Services_Intelligence) agency to the Afghan Mujahideen who were fighting the Soviet occupation.

At the same time, a growing number of Arab *mujahideen* joined the *jihad* against the [Afghan Marxist regime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Republic_of_Afghanistan), facilitated by international Muslim organizations, particularly the [Maktab al-Khidamat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maktab_al-Khidamat), which was funded by the Saudi Arabia government as well as by individual Muslims (particularly Saudi businessmen who were approached by bin Laden). Together, these sources donated some $600 million a year to jihad.

In 1984 [Maktab al-Khidamat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maktab_al-Khidamat) (MAK), or the "Services Office", a Muslim organization founded to raise and channel funds and recruit foreign *mujahideen* for the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, was established in [Peshawar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peshawar), Pakistan, by bin Laden and [Abdullah Yusuf Azzam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_Yusuf_Azzam), a Palestinian Islamic scholar and member of the [Muslim Brotherhood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood). MAK organized [guest houses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_safe_house) in Peshawar, near the Afghan border, and gathered supplies for the construction of paramilitary training camps to prepare foreign recruits for the Afghan war front. Bin Laden became a "major financier" of the *mujahideen*, spending his own money and using his connections with "the Saudi royal family and the Petro-billionaires of the Gulf" to influence public opinion about the war and raise additional funds.



[Omar Abdel-Rahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_Abdel-Rahman)

From 1986, MAK began to set up a network of recruiting offices in the U.S., the hub of which was the [Al Kifah Refugee Center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Kifah_Refugee_Center) at the Farouq Mosque on [Brooklyn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooklyn)'s Atlantic Avenue. Among notable figures at the Brooklyn center were "double agent" [Ali Mohamed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Mohamed), whom FBI special agent Jack Cloonan called "bin Laden's first trainer," and "Blind Sheikh" [Omar Abdel-Rahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_Abdel-Rahman), a leading recruiter of *mujahideen* for Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda evolved from MAK.

Azzam and bin Laden began to establish camps in Afghanistan in 1987.

U.S. government financial support for the Afghan Islamic militants was substantial. Aid to [Gulbuddin Hekmatyar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulbuddin_Hekmatyar), an Afghan *mujahideen* leader. and founder and leader of the [Hezb-e Islami](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hezb-e_Islami) radical Islamic militant faction, alone amounted "by the most conservative estimates" to $600 million. Later, in the early 1990s, after the U.S. had withdrawn support, Hekmatyar "worked closely" with bin Laden. In addition to receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in American aid, Hekmatyar was the recipient of the lion's share of Saudi aid. There is evidence that the [CIA supported](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CIA_drug_trafficking) Hekmatyar's drug trade activities by giving him immunity for his opium trafficking, which financed the operation of his militant faction.

MAK and foreign *mujahideen* volunteers, or "Afghan Arabs," did not play a major role in the war. While over 250,000 Afghan *mujahideen* fought the Soviets and the communist Afghan government, it is estimated that were never more than 2,000 foreign *mujahideen* in the field at any one time. Nonetheless, foreign *mujahideen* volunteers came from 43 countries, and the total number that participated in the Afghan movement between 1982 and 1992 is reported to have been 35,000. Bin Laden played a central role in organizing training camps for the foreign Muslim volunteers.

The Soviet Union finally withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. To the surprise of many, [Mohammad Najibullah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Najibullah)'s communist Afghan government hung on for three more years, before being overrun by elements of the *mujahideen*. With *mujahideen* leaders unable to agree on a structure for governance, chaos ensued, with constantly reorganizing alliances fighting for control of ill-defined territories, leaving the country devastated.

**Expanding operations**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **“** | the correlation between the words and deeds of bin Laden, his lieutenants, and their allies was close to perfect—if they said they were going to do something, they were much more than likely to try to do it. Their record in this regard puts Western leaders to shame. | **”** |
| —[Michael Scheuer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Scheuer), CIA Station Chief | | |

Toward the end of the [Soviet military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army) mission in Afghanistan, some *mujahideen* wanted to expand their operations to include Islamist struggles in other parts of the world, such as Israel and [Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir). A number of overlapping and interrelated organizations were formed, to further those aspirations.

One of these was the organization that would eventually be called al-Qaeda, formed by bin Laden with an initial meeting held on August 11, 1988.

Notes of a meeting of bin Laden and others on August 20, 1988, indicate al-Qaeda was a formal group by that time: "basically an organized Islamic faction, its goal is to lift the word of God, to make His religion victorious." A list of requirements for membership itemized the following: listening ability, good manners, obedience, and making a pledge ([*bayat*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bay%27at)) to follow one's superiors.

According to Wright, the group's real name wasn't used in public pronouncements because "its existence was still a closely held secret." His research suggests that al-Qaeda was formed at an August 11, 1988, meeting between "several senior leaders" of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, [Abdullah Azzam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_Yusuf_Azzam), and bin Laden, where it was agreed to join bin Laden's money with the expertise of the Islamic Jihad organization and take up the jihadist cause elsewhere after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan.

Bin Laden wished to establish non-military operations in other parts of the world; Azzam, in contrast, wanted to remain focused on military campaigns. After Azzam was assassinated in 1989, the MAK split, with a significant number joining bin Laden's organization.

In November 1989, [Ali Mohamed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Mohamed), a former special forces Sergeant stationed at [Fort Bragg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Bragg_(North_Carolina)), North Carolina, left military service and moved to California. He traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan and became "deeply involved with bin Laden's plans."

A year later, on November 8, 1990, the FBI raided the New Jersey home of Ali Mohammed's associate [El Sayyid Nosair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Sayyid_Nosair), discovering a great deal of evidence of terrorist plots, including plans to blow up New York City skyscrapers. Nosair was eventually convicted in connection to the 1993 [World Trade Center bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center_bombing), and for the murder of [Rabbi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbi) [Meir Kahane](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meir_Kahane) on November 5, 1990. In 1991, Ali Mohammed is said to have helped orchestrate bin Laden's relocation to Sudan.

**Gulf War and the start of U.S. enmity**

Main article: [Gulf War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War)

Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia. The [Iraqi invasion of Kuwait](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_invasion_of_Kuwait) in August 1990 had put the Kingdom and its ruling [House of Saud](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Saud) at risk. The world's most valuable oil fields were within easy striking distance of Iraqi forces in Kuwait, and Saddam's call to pan-Arab/Islamism could potentially rally internal dissent.

In the face of a seemingly massive Iraqi military presence, Saudi Arabia's own forces were well armed but far outnumbered. Bin Laden offered the services of his *mujahideen* to [King Fahd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fahd_of_Saudi_Arabia) to protect Saudi Arabia from the Iraqi army. The Saudi monarch refused bin Laden's offer, opting instead to allow U.S. and allied forces to deploy troops into Saudi territory.

The deployment angered Bin Laden, as he believed the presence of foreign troops in the "land of the two mosques" ([Mecca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mecca) and [Medina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medina)) profaned sacred soil. After speaking publicly against the Saudi government for harboring American troops, he was banished and forced to live in exile in Sudan.

**Sudan**

From around 1992 to 1996, al-Qaeda and bin Laden based themselves in Sudan at the invitation of Islamist theoretician [Hassan al Turabi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hassan_al_Turabi). The move followed an Islamist coup d'état in Sudan, led by Colonel [Omar al-Bashir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_al-Bashir), who professed a commitment to reordering Muslim political values. During this time, bin Laden assisted the Sudanese government, bought or set up various business enterprises, and established camps where insurgents trained.

A key turning point for bin Laden, further pitting him against the Saud’s, occurred in 1993 when Saudi Arabia gave support for the [Oslo Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords), which set a path for peace between Israel and [Palestinians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinians).

Zawahiri and the EIJ, who served as the core of al-Qaeda but also engaged in separate operations against the Egyptian government, had bad luck in Sudan. In 1993, a young schoolgirl was killed in an unsuccessful EIJ attempt on the life of the Egyptian prime minister, [Atef Sedki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atef_Sedki). Egyptian public opinion turned against Islamist bombings, and the police arrested 280 of al-Jihad's members and executed 6.

Due to bin Laden's continuous verbal assault on King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, on March 5, 1994 Fahd sent an emissary to Sudan demanding bin Laden's passport; bin Laden's Saudi citizenship was also revoked. His family was persuaded to cut off his monthly stipend, $7 million ($11,000,000 today) a year, and his Saudi assets were frozen. His family publicly disowned him. There is controversy over whether and to what extent he continued to garner support from members of his family and/or the Saudi government.

In June 1995 an even more ill-fated [attempt to assassinate Egyptian president Mubarak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Islamic_Jihad#Mubarak_assassination_attempt) led to the expulsion of EIJ, and in May 1996, of bin Laden, by the Sudanese government.

According to [Pakistani-American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistani-American) businessman [Mansoor Ijaz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mansoor_Ijaz), the Sudanese government offered the [Clinton Administration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clinton_Administration) numerous opportunities to arrest bin Laden. Those opportunities were met positively by Secretary of State [Madeleine Albright](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeleine_Albright), but spurned when [Susan Rice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_Rice) and counter-terrorism czar [Richard Clarke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_A._Clarke) persuaded National Security Advisor [Sandy Berger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Berger) to overrule Albright. Ijaz’s claims appeared in numerous [Op-Ed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Op-Ed) pieces, including one in the [*Los Angeles Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles_Times) and one in [*The Washington Post*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Washington_Post) co-written with former Ambassador to Sudan [Timothy M. Carney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_M._Carney). Similar allegations have been made by [*Vanity Fair*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanity_Fair_(magazine)) contributing editor David Rose, and [Richard Miniter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Miniter), author of *Losing bin Laden*, in a November 2003 interview with [*World*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_(magazine)).

Several sources dispute Ijaz's claim, including the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the U.S. (the 9–11 Commission), which concluded in part:

Sudan's minister of defense, Fatih Erwa, has claimed that Sudan offered to hand Bin Ladin over to the U.S. The Commission has found no credible evidence that this was so. Ambassador Carney had instructions only to push the Sudanese to expel Bin Ladin. Ambassador Carney had no legal basis to ask for more from the Sudanese since, at the time, there was no indictment out-standing.

**Refuge in Afghanistan**

Main articles: [Taliban's rise to power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban%27s_rise_to_power) and [Afghan training camp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_training_camp)

After the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan was effectively ungoverned for seven years and plagued by constant infighting between former allies and various *mujahideen* groups.

Throughout the 1990s, a new force began to emerge. The origins of the [Taliban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban) (literally "students") lay in the children of Afghanistan, many of them orphaned by the war, and many of whom had been educated in the rapidly expanding network of Islamic schools ([madrassas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madrassa)) either in [Kandahar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kandahar) or in the refugee camps on the Afghan-Pakistani border.

According to [Ahmed Rashid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed_Rashid), five leaders of the Taliban were graduates of [Darul Uloom Haqqania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darul_Uloom_Haqqania), a madrassa in the small town of Akora Khattak. The town is situated near [Peshawar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peshawar) in Pakistan, but largely attended by [Afghan refugees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_refugees). This institution reflected [Salafi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salafi) beliefs in its teachings, and much of its funding came from private donations from wealthy Arabs. Bin Laden's contacts were still laundering most of these donations, using "unscrupulous" Islamic banks to transfer the money to an "array" of charities which serve as front groups for al-Qaeda, or transporting cash-filled suitcases straight into Pakistan. Another four of the Taliban's leaders attended a similarly funded and influenced madrassa in Kandahar.

Many of the *mujahideen* who later joined the Taliban fought alongside Afghan warlord [Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Nabi_Mohammadi)'s Harkat i Inqilabi group at the time of the Russian invasion. This group also enjoyed the loyalty of most Afghan Arab fighters.

The continuing internecine strife between various factions, and accompanying lawlessness following the Soviet withdrawal, enabled the growing and well-disciplined Taliban to expand their control over territory in Afghanistan, and it came to establish an enclave which it called the [Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Emirate_of_Afghanistan). In 1994, it captured the regional center of Kandahar, and after making rapid territorial gains thereafter, conquered the capital city [Kabul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabul) in September 1996.

After the Sudanese made it clear, in May 1996, that bin Laden would never be welcome to return, Taliban-controlled Afghanistan—with previously established connections between the groups, administered with a shared militancy, and largely isolated from American political influence and military power—provided a perfect location for al-Qaeda to relocate its headquarters. Al-Qaeda enjoyed the Taliban's protection and a measure of legitimacy as part of their Ministry of Defense, although only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

While in Afghanistan, the Taliban government tasked al-Qaeda with the training of [Brigade 055](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/055_Brigade), an elite part of the Taliban's army from 1997–2001. The Brigade was made up of mostly foreign fighters, many veterans from the Soviet Invasion, and all under the same basic ideology of the mujahideen. In November 2001, as [Operation Enduring Freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001-present)) had toppled the Taliban government, many Brigade 055 fighters were captured or killed, and those that survived were thought to head into Pakistan along with bin Laden.

By the end of 2008, some sources reported that the Taliban had severed any remaining ties with al-Qaeda, while others cast doubt on this. According to senior U.S. military intelligence officials, there were fewer than 100 members of al-Qaeda remaining in Afghanistan in 2009.

**Call for global jihad**

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|  | This section requires [expansion](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Al-Qaeda&action=edit). *(September 2009)* |

Around 1994, the Salafi groups waging [*jihad*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salafist_jihadism) in Bosnia entered into a seemingly irreversible decline. As they grew less and less aggressive, groups such as EIJ began to drift away from the Salafi cause in Europe. Al-Qaeda decided to step in and assumed control of around 80% of the terrorist cells in Bosnia in late 1995.

At the same time, al-Qaeda ideologues instructed the network's recruiters to look for [*Jihadi international*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jihadi_international), Muslims who believed that *jihad* must be fought on a global level. The concept of a "global Salafi *jihad*" had been around since at least the early 1980s. Several groups had formed for the explicit purpose of driving non-Muslims out of every Muslim land, at the same time, and with maximum carnage. This was, however, a fundamentally defensive strategy.

Al-Qaeda sought to open the "offensive phase" of the global Salafi *jihad*. Bosnian Islamists in 2006 called for "solidarity with Islamic causes around the world", supporting the insurgents in Kashmir and Iraq as well as the groups fighting for a Palestinian state.

**Fatwas**



[Khobar Towers bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khobar_Towers_bombing)

In 1996, al-Qaeda announced its *jihad* to expel foreign troops and interests from what they considered Islamic lands. Bin Laden issued a *fatwa* (binding religious edict), which amounted to a public declaration of war against the U.S. and its allies, and began to refocus al-Qaeda's resources on large-scale, propagandist strikes. In June 1996, the [Khobar Towers bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khobar_Towers_bombing) took place in [Khobar, Saudi Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khobar,_Saudi_Arabia), attributed by some to al-Qaeda, killing 19 Americans and one Saudi local, and wounding 372.

On February 23, 1998, bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, a leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, along with three other Islamist leaders, co-signed and issued a *fatwa* calling on Muslims to kill Americans and their allies where they can, when they can. Under the banner of the [World Islamic Front for Combat Against the Jews and Crusaders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Islamic_Front), they declared:

[T]he ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the holy mosque [in Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, 'and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,' and 'fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah'.

Neither bin Laden nor al-Zawahiri possessed the traditional Islamic scholarly qualifications to issue a *fatwa*. However, they rejected the authority of the contemporary [*ulema*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulema) (which they saw as the paid servants of [*jahiliyya*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jahiliyya) rulers), and took it upon themselves. Former Russian [FSB](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Security_Service_of_the_Russian_Federation) agent [Alexander Litvinenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Litvinenko), who was later killed, said that the FSB trained al-Zawahiri in a camp in [Dagestan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dagestan) eight months before the 1998 *fatwa*.

**Iraq**

Main article: [Al-Qaeda in Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_Iraq)

Al-Qaeda is [Sunni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunni), and often attacked the Iraqi [Shia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia) majority in an attempt to incite [sectarian violence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sectarian_violence) and greater chaos in the country. Al-Zarqawi purportedly declared an all-out war on Shiites while claiming responsibility for Shiite mosque bombings. The same month, a statement claiming to be by AQI rejected as "fake" a letter allegedly written by al-Zawahiri, in which he appears to question the insurgents' tactic of indiscriminately attacking Shiites in Iraq. In a December 2007 video, al-Zawahiri defended the Islamic State in Iraq, but distanced himself from the attacks against civilians committed by "hypocrites and traitors existing among the ranks".

U.S. and Iraqi officials accused AQI of trying to slide Iraq into a full-scale civil war between Iraq's majority Shiites and minority Sunni Arabs, with an orchestrated campaign of civilian massacres and a number of provocative attacks against high-profile religious targets. With attacks such as the 2003 [Imam Ali Mosque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam_Ali_Mosque) bombing, the 2004 Day of Ashura and Karbala and Najaf bombings, the 2006 [first al-Askari Mosque bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Askari_Mosque_bombing_(2006)) in [Samarra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samarra), the deadly single-day [series of bombings in which at least 215 people were killed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/November_23,_2006_Sadr_City_bombings) in Baghdad's Shiite district of [Sadr City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadr_City), and the [second al-Askari bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_al-Askari_Mosque_bombing) in 2007, they provoked Shiite militias to unleash a wave of retaliatory attacks, resulting in [death squad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_squad)-style killings and spiraling further sectarian violence which escalated in 2006 and brought Iraq to the brink of violent anarchy in 2007. In 2008, sectarian bombings blamed on al-Qaeda killed [at least 42 people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Karbala_bombing) at the [Imam Husayn Shrine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam_Husayn_Shrine) in Karbala in March, and [at least 51 people](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=June_17,_2008_Baghdad_bombing&action=edit&redlink=1) at a bus stop in Baghdad in June.

**Somalia and Yemen**

Main articles: [Al-Shabaab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Shabaab) and [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_the_Arabian_Peninsula)

In Somalia, al-Qaeda agents had been collaborating closely with the its Somalian wing, which was created from the al-Shabaab group. In February 2012, al-Shabaab officially joined al-Qaeda, declaring loyalty in a joint video. The Somalian al-Qaeda actively recruit children for suicide-bomber training, and export young people to participate in military actions against Americans at the AfPak border.

The percentage of terrorist attacks in the West originating from the Afghanistan-Pakistan ([AfPak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AfPak)) border declined considerably from almost 100% to 75% in 2007, and to 50% in 2010, as al-Qaeda shifted to Somalia and Yemen. While al-Qaeda leaders are hiding in the tribal areas along the AfPak border, the middle-tier of the movement display heightened activity in Somalia and Yemen. “We know that South Asia is no longer their primary base,” a U.S. defense agency source said. “They are looking for a hide-out in other parts of the world, and continue to expand their organization.“

In January 2009, al-Qaeda’s division in Saudi Arabia merged with its Yemeni wing to form [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_the_Arabian_Peninsula). Centered in Yemen, the group takes advantage of the country's poor economy, demography and domestic security. In August 2009, they made the first assassination attempt against a member of the Saudi royal dynasty in decades. President Obama asked his Yemen counterpart [Ali Abdullah Saleh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Abdullah_Saleh) to ensure closer cooperation with the U.S. in the struggle against the growing activity of al-Qaeda in Yemen, and promised to send additional aid. Because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. was unable to pay sufficient attention to Somalia and Yemen, which could cause problems in the near future. In December 2011, U.S. Secretary of Defense [Leon Panetta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Panetta) said that the U.S. operations against al-Qaeda "are now concentrating on key groups in Yemen, Somalia and North Africa." Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility for the 2009 bombing attack on [Northwest Airlines Flight 253](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest_Airlines_Flight_253) by [Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umar_Farouk_Abdulmutallab). The group released photos of Abdulmutallab smiling in a white shirt and white Islamic skullcap, with the al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula banner in the background.

**American operations**



[Anwar al-Awlaki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anwar_al-Awlaki)

In December 1998, the [Director of Central Intelligence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Director_of_Central_Intelligence) Counterterrorist Center reported to the president that al-Qaeda was preparing for attacks in the USA, including the training of personnel to hijack aircraft. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda [attacked](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9/11_attacks) the United States, hijacking four airliners and deliberately crashing them. The attackers killed 2,977 people.

U.S. officials called [Anwar al-Awlaki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anwar_al-Awlaki) an "example of al-Qaeda reach into" the U.S. in 2008 after probes into his ties to the September 11 attacks hijackers. A former FBI agent identifies Awlaki as a known "senior recruiter for al-Qaeda", and a spiritual motivator. Awlaki's sermons in the U.S. were attended by three of the [9/11](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks) hijackers, as well as accused [Fort Hood shooter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Hood_shooting) [Nidal Malik Hasan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nidal_Malik_Hasan). U.S. intelligence intercepted emails from Hasan to Awlaki between December 2008 and early 2009. On his website, Awlaki has praised Hasan's actions in the Fort Hood shooting.

An unnamed official claimed there was good reason to believe Awlaki "has been involved in very serious terrorist activities since leaving the U.S. [after 9/11], including plotting attacks against America and our allies.” In addition, "Christmas Day bomber" [Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umar_Farouk_Abdulmutallab) said al-Awlaki was one of his al-Qaeda trainers, meeting with him and involved in planning or preparing the attack, and provided religious justification for it, according to unnamed U.S. intelligence officials. In March 2010, al‑Awlaki said in a videotape delivered to [CNN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNN) that jihad against America was binding upon himself and every other able Muslim.

U.S. President [Barack Obama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama) approved the [targeted killing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Targeted_killing) of al-Awlaki by April 2010, making al-Awlaki the first U.S. citizen ever placed on the CIA target list. That required the consent of the [U.S. National Security Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._National_Security_Council), and officials said it was appropriate for an individual who posed an imminent danger to national security. In May 2010, [Faisal Shahzad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faisal_Shahzad), who pleaded guilty to the [2010 Times Square car bombing attempt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Times_Square_car_bombing_attempt), told interrogators he was "inspired by" al-Awlaki, and sources said Shahzad had made contact with al-Awlaki over the internet. Representative [Jane Harman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Harman) called him "terrorist number one", and [*Investor's Business Daily*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Investor%27s_Business_Daily) called him "the world's most dangerous man". In July 2010, the [U.S. Treasury Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Treasury_Department) added him to its list of [Specially Designated Global Terrorists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Specially_Designated_Global_Terrorist), and the UN added him to its list of individuals associated with al-Qaeda. In August 2010, al-Awlaki's father initiated a lawsuit against the U.S. government with the [American Civil Liberties Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_Liberties_Union), challenging its order to kill al-Awlaki. In October 2010, U.S. and U.K. officials linked al-Awlaki to the [2010 cargo plane bomb plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_cargo_plane_bomb_plot). In September 2011, he was killed in a targeted killing drone attack in Yemen. It was reported on March 16, 2012 that [Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden) plotted to kill [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) [President](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President) [Barack Obama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama).

**Death of Osama bin Laden**

Main article: [Death of Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Osama_bin_Laden)



View of Osama bin Laden's compound in [Abbottabad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbottabad), Pakistan, where he was killed on May 1, 2011.

On May 1, 2011 in Washington, D.C. (May 2, [Pakistan Standard Time](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_Standard_Time)), U.S. President Barack Obama announced that Osama bin Laden had been killed by "a small team of Americans" acting under Obama's direct orders, [in a covert operation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden%27s_hideout_compound) in [Abbottabad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbottabad), Pakistan, about 50 km (31 mi) north of Islamabad. According to U.S. officials a team of 20–25 [US Navy SEALs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_Navy_SEALs) under the command of the [Joint Special Operations Command](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_Special_Operations_Command) and working with the CIA stormed bin Laden's compound in two helicopters. Bin Laden and those with him were killed during a firefight in which U.S. forces experienced no injuries or casualties. According to one US official the attack was carried out without the knowledge or consent of the Pakistani authorities. In Pakistan some people were reported to be shocked at the unauthorized incursion by US armed forces. The site is a few miles from the [Pakistan Military Academy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_Military_Academy) in [Kakul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kakul). In his broadcast announcement President Obama said that U.S. forces "took care to avoid civilian casualties."

Details soon emerged that three men and a woman were killed along with Bin Laden, the woman being killed when she was “used as a shield by a male combatant”. DNA from bin Laden's body, compared with DNA samples on record from his dead sister, confirmed bin Laden's identity. The body was recovered by the US military and was in its custodyuntil, according to one US official, his body was [buried at sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burial_at_sea) according to Islamic traditions. One U.S. official stated that "finding a country willing to accept the remains of the world's most wanted terrorist would have been difficult." U.S State Department issued a "Worldwide caution" for Americans following Bin Laden's death and U.S Diplomatic facilities everywhere were placed on high alert, a senior U.S official said. Crowds gathered outside the White House and in New York City's Time Square to celebrate Bin Laden's death.

**Attacks**

Main article: [Timeline of al-Qaeda attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_al-Qaeda_attacks)



Map of major attacks attributed to al-Qaeda:  
1. [The Pentagon, US](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks) – Sep 11, 2001  
2. [World Trade Center, US](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks) – Sep 11, 2001  
3. [Istanbul, Turkey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_Istanbul_bombings) – Nov 15, 2003; Nov 20, 2003  
4. [Aden, Yemen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Cole_bombing) – Oct 12, 2000  
5. [Nairobi, Kenya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_United_States_embassy_bombings) – Aug 7, 1998  
6. [Dar es Salaam, Tanzania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_United_States_embassy_bombings) – Aug 7, 1998



Al-Qaeda has carried out a total of six major terrorist attacks, four of them in its jihad against America. In each case the leadership planned the attack years in advance, arranging for the shipment of weapons and explosives and using its privatized businesses to provide operatives with safehouses and false identities.

Al-Qaeda usually does not disburse funds for attacks, and very rarely makes wire transfers.

**1992**

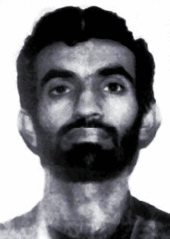
On December 29, 1992, al-Qaeda's first terrorist attack took place as two bombs were detonated in [Aden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aden), Yemen. The first target was the Movenpick Hotel and the second was the parking lot of the Goldmohur Hotel.

The bombings were an attempt to eliminate American soldiers on their way to Somalia to take part in the international famine relief effort, [Operation Restore Hope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Restore_Hope). Internally, al-Qaeda considered the bombing a victory that frightened the Americans away, but in the U.S. the attack was barely noticed.

No Americans were killed because the soldiers were staying in a different hotel altogether, and they went on to Somalia as scheduled. However little noticed, the attack was pivotal as it was the beginning of al-Qaeda's change in direction, from fighting armies to killing civilians. Two people were killed in the bombing, an Australian tourist and a Yemeni hotel worker. Seven others, mostly Yemenis, were severely injured.

Two fatwas are said to have been appointed by the most theologically knowledgeable of al-Qaeda's members, [Mamdouh Mahmud Salim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamdouh_Mahmud_Salim), to justify the killings according to Islamic law. Salim referred to a famous fatwa appointed by [Ibn Taymiyyah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibn_Taymiyyah), a 13th-century scholar much admired by Wahhabis, which sanctioned resistance by any means during the Mongol invasions.

**1993 World Trade Center bombing**



[Ramzi Yousef](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramzi_Yousef)

Main article: [World Trade Center bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center_bombing)

In 1993, [Ramzi Yousef](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramzi_Yousef) used a truck bomb to attack the [World Trade Center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center) in New York City. The attack was intended to break the foundation of Tower One knocking it into Tower Two, bringing the entire complex down.

Yousef hoped this would kill 250,000 people. The towers shook and swayed but the foundation held and he succeeded in killing only six people (although he injured 1,042 others and caused nearly $300 million in property damage).

After the attack, Yousef fled to Pakistan and later moved to [Manila](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manila). There he began developing the [Bojinka Plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bojinka_Plot) plans to implode a dozen American airliners simultaneously, to assassinate Pope [John Paul II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Paul_II) and President [Bill Clinton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Clinton), and to crash a private plane into CIA headquarters. He was later captured in Pakistan.

None of the U.S. government's indictments against bin Laden have suggested that he had any connection with this bombing, but Ramzi Yousef is known to have attended a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. After his capture, Yousef declared that his primary justification for the attack was to punish the U.S. for its support for the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and made no mention of any religious motivations.

**Late 1990s**



1998 [Nairobi embassy bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_United_States_embassy_bombings)

Main articles: [1998 United States embassy bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_United_States_embassy_bombings) and [USS Cole bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Cole_bombing)

In 1996, bin Laden personally engineered a plot to assassinate Clinton while the president was in [Manila](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manila) for the [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia_Pacific_Economic_Cooperation). However, intelligence agents intercepted a message just minutes before the motorcade was to leave, and alerted the [U.S. Secret Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Secret_Service). Agents later discovered a bomb planted under a bridge.

The [1998 U.S. embassy bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_U.S._embassy_bombings) in East Africa, resulting in upward of 300 deaths, mostly locals. A barrage of [cruise missiles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruise_missile) launched by the U.S. military in response devastated an al-Qaeda base in [Khost](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khost), Afghanistan, but the network's capacity was unharmed.

In October 2000, al-Qaeda militants in Yemen bombed the missile [destroyer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destroyer) [*U.S.S. Cole*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Cole_bombing) in a suicide attack, killing 17 U.S. servicemen and damaging the vessel while it lay offshore. Inspired by the success of such a brazen attack, al-Qaeda's command core began to prepare for an attack on the U.S. itself.

**September 11 attacks**

Main article: [September 11 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks)

See also: [Responsibility for the September 11 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Responsibility_for_the_September_11_attacks)



Aftermath of the September 11 attacks

The September 11, 2001 attacks were the most devastating terrorist acts in American history, killing approximately 3,000 people. Two commercial airliners were deliberately flown into the [World Trade Center](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center) towers, a third into [The Pentagon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pentagon), and a fourth, originally intended to target the [United States Capitol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Capitol), crashed in a field in [Shanksville, Pennsylvania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanksville,_Pennsylvania).

The attacks were conducted by al-Qaeda, acting in accord with the [1998 *fatwa*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fat%C4%81w%C4%81_of_Osama_bin_Laden#1998_Fatwa) issued against the U.S. and its allies by military forces under the command of bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and others. Evidence points to suicide squads led by al-Qaeda military commander [Mohamed Atta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Atta) as the culprits of the attacks, with bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, [Khalid Shaikh Mohammed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalid_Shaikh_Mohammed), and [Hambali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hambali) as the key planners and part of the political and military command.

Messages issued by bin Laden after September 11, 2001 praised the attacks, and explained their motivation while denying any involvement. Bin Laden legitimized the attacks by identifying grievances felt by both mainstream and Islamist Muslims, such as the general perception that the U.S. was actively oppressing Muslims.

Bin Laden asserted that America was massacring Muslims in '[Palestine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_National_Authority), [Chechnya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chechnya), [Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir) and Iraq' and that Muslims should retain the 'right to attack in reprisal'. He also claimed the 9/11 attacks were not targeted at women and children, but 'America's icons of military and economic power'.

Evidence has since come to light that the original targets for the attack may have been nuclear power stations on the east coast of the U.S. The targets were later altered by al-Qaeda, as it was feared that such an attack "might get out of hand".

**Designation as terrorist organization**

Al-Qaeda has been designated a [*terrorist organization*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorist_organization) by the following countries and international organizations:

* Australia
* Canada
* [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union)
* France
* Germany
* India
* Ireland
* Israel
* Japan
* Netherlands
* [NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO)
* Philippines
* Russia
* South Korea
* Sweden
* Switzerland
* Turkey
* United Kingdom
* [United Nations Security Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council)
* United States

**War on Terrorism**

Main article: [War on Terror](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terror)



U.S. troops in Afghanistan

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the U.S. government [decided to respond militarily](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authorization_for_Use_of_Military_Force_Against_Terrorists), and began to prepare its [armed forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_the_United_States) to overthrow the Taliban regime it believed was harboring al-Qaeda. Before the U.S. attacked, it offered Taliban leader [Mullah Omar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Omar) a chance to surrender bin Laden and his top associates. The first forces to be inserted into Afghanistan were Paramilitary Officers from the CIA's elite [Special Activities Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Activities_Division) (SAD).

The [Taliban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban) offered to turn over bin Laden to a [neutral country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neutral_country) for trial if the U.S. would provide evidence of bin Laden's complicity in the attacks. [U.S. President](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_United_States) [George W. Bush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_W._Bush) responded by saying: "We know he's guilty. Turn him over", and British Prime Minister [Tony Blair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Blair) warned the Taliban regime: "Surrender bin Laden, or surrender power".

Soon thereafter the U.S. and its allies invaded Afghanistan, and together with the [Afghan Northern Alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Alliance) removed the Taliban government in the [war in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%93present)).

As a result of the U.S. using its [special forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_forces) and providing [air support](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Close_air_support) for the [Northern Alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Alliance) [ground forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infantry), both [Taliban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban) and [al-Qaeda training camps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derunta_training_camp) were destroyed, and much of the operating structure of al-Qaeda is believed to have been disrupted. After being driven from their key positions in the [Tora Bora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tora_Bora) area of Afghanistan, many al-Qaeda fighters tried to regroup in the rugged [Gardez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gardez) region of the nation.



[Khalid Sheikh Mohammed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalid_Sheikh_Mohammed) after his arrest in [Rawalpindi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rawalpindi), Pakistan, in March 2003.

Again, under the cover of intense [aerial bombardment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aerial_bombing_of_cities), U.S. [infantry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infantry) and local Afghan forces attacked, shattering the al-Qaeda position and killing or capturing many of the militants. By early 2002, al-Qaeda had been dealt a serious blow to its operational capacity, and the Afghan invasion appeared an initial success. Nevertheless, a significant [Taliban insurgency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban_insurgency) remains in Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda's top two leaders, bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, evaded capture.

Debate raged about the exact nature of al-Qaeda's role in the 9/11 attacks, and after the U.S. invasion began, the [U.S. State Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_State_Department) also released a [videotape](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Videos_of_Osama_bin_Laden#December_13.2C_2001) showing bin Laden speaking with a small group of associates somewhere in Afghanistan shortly before the Taliban was removed from power. Although its authenticity has been questioned by some, the tape appears to implicate bin Laden and al-Qaeda in the September 11 attacks and was aired on many [television channels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television_channels) all over the world, with an accompanying [English translation](http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/12/13/tape.transcript/) provided by the [U.S. Defense Department](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Defense_Department).

In September 2004, the US government [9/11 Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9/11_Commission) investigating the September 11 attacks officially concluded that the attacks were conceived and implemented by al-Qaeda operatives. In October 2004, bin Laden appeared to claim responsibility for the attacks in a [videotape](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Osama_bin_Laden_video) released through Al Jazeera, saying he was inspired by Israeli attacks on high-rises in the 1982 [invasion of Lebanon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982_Lebanon_War): "As I looked at those demolished towers in Lebanon, it entered my mind that we should punish the oppressor in kind and that we should destroy towers in America in order that they taste some of what we tasted and so that they be deterred from killing our women and children."

By the end of 2004, the U.S. government proclaimed that two-thirds of the most senior al-Qaeda figures from 2001 had been captured and interrogated by the CIA: [Abu Zubaydah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Zubaydah), [Ramzi bin al-Shibh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramzi_bin_al-Shibh) and [Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_al-Rahim_al-Nashiri) in 2002; [Khalid Sheikh Mohammed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalid_Sheikh_Mohammed) in 2003; and [Saif al Islam el Masry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saif_al_Islam_el_Masry) in 2004. [Mohammed Atef](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Atef) and several others were killed.

**Activities**

**Africa**

Main article: [Al-Qaeda involvement in Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_involvement_in_Africa)



Front page of [*The Guardian Weekly*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Guardian_Weekly) on the eighth anniversary of the September 11 attacks. The article claimed that al-Qaeda's activity is "increasingly dispersed to 'affiliates' or 'franchises' in Yemen and North Africa."

[Al-Qaeda involvement in Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_involvement_in_Africa) has included a number of bombing attacks in North Africa, as well as supporting parties in civil wars in Eritrea and Somalia. From 1991 to 1996, bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders were based in Sudan.

Islamist rebels in the [Sahara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahara) calling themselves [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_the_Islamic_Maghreb) have stepped up their violence in recent years. French officials say the rebels have no real links to the al-Qaeda leadership, but this is a matter of some dispute in the international press and amongst security analysts. It seems likely that bin Laden approved the group's name in late 2006, and the rebels "took on the al Qaeda franchise label", almost a year before the violence began to escalate.

In [Mali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali), the [Ansar Dine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ansar_Dine) faction was also reported as an ally of Al-Qaeda in 2013. The Ansar al Dine faction aligned themselves with the [AQIM](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_the_Islamic_Maghreb).

**Europe**

Main article: [Al-Qaeda involvement in Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_involvement_in_Europe)

In 2003, Islamists carried out a series of bombings in [Istanbul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul) killing fifty-seven people and injuring seven hundred. Seventy-four people were charged by the Turkish authorities. Some had previously met Bin Laden, and though they specifically declined to pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda they asked for its blessing and help.

In 2009, three Londoners, Tanvir Hussain, Assad Sarwar and Ahmed Abdullah Ali, were convicted of [conspiring to detonate bombs disguised as soft drinks on seven airplanes bound for Canada and the U.S.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_transatlantic_aircraft_plot) The massively complex police and [MI5](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MI5) investigation of the plot involved more than a year of surveillance work conducted by over two hundred officers. British and U.S. officials said the plan—unlike many recent homegrown European terrorist plots—was directly linked to al-Qaeda and guided by senior Islamic militants in Pakistan.

In 2012, Russian Intelligence indicated that al-Qaeda had given a call for "forest jihad" and has been starting massive forest fires as part of a strategy of "thousand cuts".

**Arab world**

Main articles: [Al-Qaeda involvement in the Middle East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_involvement_in_the_Middle_East), [Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_the_Islamic_Maghreb), [Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_the_Arabian_Peninsula), and [USS Cole bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Cole_bombing)



USS *Cole* after the October 2000 attack

Following [Yemeni unification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemeni_unification) in 1990, Wahhabi networks began moving missionaries into the country in an effort to subvert the capitalist north. Although it is unlikely bin Laden or Saudi al-Qaeda were directly involved, the personal connections they made would be established over the next decade and used in the [*USS Cole* bombing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Cole_bombing). Concerns grow over Al Qaeda's group in [Yemen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemeni_al-Qaeda_crackdown).

In Iraq, al-Qaeda forces loosely associated with the leadership were embedded in the [Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jama%27at_al-Tawhid_wal-Jihad) organization commanded by [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Musab_al-Zarqawi). Specializing in suicide operations, they have been a "key driver" of the [Sunni insurgency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_insurgency). Although they played a small part in the overall insurgency, between 30% and 42% of all suicide bombings which took place in the early years were claimed by Zarqawi's organization. Reports have indicated that oversights such as the failure to control access to the Qa'qaa munitions factory in [Yusufiyah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yusufiyah) have allowed large quantities of munitions to fall into the hands of al-Qaida. In November 2010, the [Islamic State of Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_State_of_Iraq) militant group, which is linked to al-Qaeda in Iraq, threatened to "exterminate [Iraqi Christians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_Christians)".

Significantly, it was not until the late 1990s that al-Qaeda began training Palestinians. This is not to suggest that resistance fighters are underrepresented in the network as a number of Palestinians, mostly coming from Jordan, wanted to join and have risen to serve high-profile roles in Afghanistan. Rather, large groups such as [Hamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas) and [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Islamic_Jihad)—which cooperate with al-Qaeda in many respects—have had difficulties accepting a strategic alliance, fearing that al-Qaeda will co-opt their smaller cells. This may have changed recently, as Israeli security and intelligence services believe al-Qaeda has managed to infiltrate operatives from the Occupied Territories into Israel, and is waiting for the right time to mount an attack.

**Kashmir**

Main article: [Kashmir conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir_conflict)

Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri consider India to be a part of the ‘Crusader-Zionist-Hindu’ conspiracy against the Islamic world. According to the 2005 report 'Al Qaeda: Profile and Threat Assessment' by [Congressional Research Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congressional_Research_Service), bin Laden was involved in training militants for Jihad in Kashmir while living in Sudan in the early nineties. By 2001 Kashmiri militant group [Harkat-ul-Mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) had become a part of the al-Qaeda coalition. According to the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_High_Commissioner_for_Refugees) al-Qaeda was thought to have established bases in Pakistan-administered Kashmir (in [Azad Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azad_Kashmir), and to some extent in [Gilgit–Baltistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgit%E2%80%93Baltistan)) during the 1999 [Kargil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kargil_War) and continued to operate there with tacit approval of Pakistan's Intelligence services.

Many of the militants active in Kashmir were trained in the same [Madrasahs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madrasah) as [Taliban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban) and al-Qaeda. [Fazlur Rehman Khalil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fazlur_Rehman_Khalil) of Kashmiri militant group [Harkat-ul-Mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) was a signatory of al-Qaeda's 1998 declaration of [Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jihad) against America and its allies. In a 'Letter to American People' written by bin Laden in 2002 he stated that one of the reasons he was fighting America is because of her support to India on the Kashmir issue. In November 2001 [Kathmandu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathmandu) airport went on high alert after threats that Bin Laden planned to hijack a plane from there and crash it into a target in New Delhi. In 2002 U.S. Secretary of Defense [Donald Rumsfeld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Rumsfeld), on a trip to Delhi, suggested that al-Qaeda was active in Kashmir though he did not have any hard evidence. He proposed hi tech ground sensors along the line of control to prevent militants from infiltrating into Indian administered Kashmir. An investigation in 2002 unearthed evidence that al-Qaeda and its affiliates were prospering in Pakistan-administered Kashmir with tacit approval of Pakistan's National Intelligence agency [Inter-Services Intelligence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inter-Services_Intelligence) In 2002 a special team of [Special Air Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Air_Service) and [Delta Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delta_Force) was sent into [Indian Administered Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Administered_Kashmir) to hunt for Bin Laden after reports that he was being sheltered by Kashmiri militant group [Harkat-ul-Mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) which had previously been responsible for [1995 Kidnapping of western tourists in Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1995_Kidnapping_of_western_tourists_in_Kashmir). Britain's highest ranking al-Qaeda operative [Rangzieb Ahmed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rangzieb_Ahmed) had previously fought in Kashmir with the group [Harkat-ul-Mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) and spent time in Indian prison after being captured in Kashmir.

U.S. officials believe that al-Qaeda was helping organize a campaign of terror in Kashmir in order to provoke conflict between India and Pakistan. Their strategy was to force Pakistan to move its troops to the border with India, thereby relieving pressure on al-Qaeda elements hiding in northwestern Pakistan. In 2006 al-Qaeda claimed they had established a wing in Kashmir; this has worried the Indian government. However the Indian Army Lt. Gen. H.S. Panag, GOC-in-C Northern Command, said to reporters that the army has ruled out the presence of al-Qaeda in Indian-administered [Jammu and Kashmir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jammu_and_Kashmir); furthermore he said that there is nothing that can verify reports from the media of al-Qaeda presence in the state. He however stated that al-Qaeda had strong ties with Kashmiri militant groups [Lashkar-e-Taiba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lashkar-e-Taiba) and [Jaish-e-Mohammed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaish-e-Mohammed) based in Pakistan. It has been noted that [Waziristan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waziristan) has now become the new battlefield for Kashmiri militants fighting [NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO) in support of al-Qaeda and Taliban. [Dhiren Barot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhiren_Barot), who wrote the *Army of Madinah In Kashmir* and was an al-Qaeda operative convicted for involvement in the [2004 financial buildings plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_financial_buildings_plot), had received training in weapons and explosives at a militant training camp in Kashmir.

[Maulana Masood Azhar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maulana_Masood_Azhar), the founder of another Kashmiri group [Jaish-e-Mohammed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaish-e-Mohammed), is believed to have met bin Laden several times and received funding from him. In 2002 [Jaish-e-Mohammed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaish-e-Mohammed) organized the kidnapping and murder of [Daniel Pearl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Pearl) in an operation run in conjunction with al-Qaeda and funded by Bin Laden. According to American [counter-terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counter-terrorism) expert [Bruce Riedel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Riedel), al-Qaeda and Taliban were closely involved in the 1999 hijacking of [Indian Airlines Flight 814](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Airlines_Flight_814) to [Kandahar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kandahar) which led to the release of [Maulana Masood Azhar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maulana_Masood_Azhar) & [Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed_Omar_Saeed_Sheikh) from an Indian prison in exchange for the passengers. This hijacking, Riedel stated, was rightly described by then Indian Foreign minister [Jaswant Singh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaswant_Singh) as a 'dress rehearsal' for September 11 attacks. Bin laden personally welcomed Azhar and threw a lavish party in his honor after his release, according to [Abu Jandal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Jandal), bodyguard of Bin Laden. Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, who had been in Indian prison for his role in [1994 kidnappings of Western tourists in India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1994_kidnappings_of_Western_tourists_in_India), went on to murder [Daniel Pearl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Pearl) and was sentenced to death by Pakistan. Al-Qaeda operative [Rashid Rauf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashid_Rauf), who was one of the accused in [2006 transatlantic aircraft plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_transatlantic_aircraft_plot), was related to Maulana Masood Azhar by marriage.

[Lashkar-e-Taiba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lashkar-e-Taiba), a Kashmiri militant group which is thought to be behind [2008 Mumbai attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Mumbai_attacks), is also known to have strong ties to senior al-Qaeda leaders living in Pakistan. In Late 2002 top al-Qaeda operative [Abu Zubaydah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Zubaydah) was arrested while being sheltered by [Lashkar-e-Taiba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lashkar-e-Taiba) in a safe house in [Faisalabad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faisalabad). The FBI believes that al-Qaeda and Lashkar have been 'intertwined' for a long time while the CIA has said that al-Qaeda funds Lashkar-e-Taiba. French investigating magistrate [Jean-Louis Bruguière](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Louis_Brugui%C3%A8re), who was the top French counter-terrorism official, told Reuters in 2009 that 'Lashkar-e-Taiba is no longer a Pakistani movement with only a Kashmir political or military agenda. Lashkar-e-Taiba is a member of al-Qaeda.'

In a video released in 2008, senior al-Qaeda operative American-born [Adam Yahiye Gadahn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Yahiye_Gadahn) stated that "victory in Kashmir has been delayed for years; it is the liberation of the jihad there from this interference which, Allah willing, will be the first step towards victory over the Hindu occupiers of that Islam land."

In September 2009 a U.S. [Drone strike](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drone_attacks_in_Pakistan) reportedly killed [Ilyas Kashmiri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilyas_Kashmiri_(militant)) who was the chief of [Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harkat-ul-Jihad_al-Islami), a Kashmiri militant group associated with al-Qaeda. Kashmiri was described by [Bruce Riedel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Riedel) as a 'prominent' al-Qaeda member while others have described him as head of military operations for al-Qaeda. Kashmiri was also charged by the U.S. in a plot against [Jyllands-Posten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten), the Danish newspaper which was at the center of [Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten_Muhammad_cartoons_controversy). U.S. officials also believe that Kashmiri was involved in the [Camp Chapman attack](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_Chapman_attack) against the CIA. In January 2010 Indian authorities notified Britain of an al-Qaeda plot to hijack an Indian airlines or Air India plane and crash it into a British city. This information was uncovered from interrogation of Amjad Khwaja, an operative of [Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harkat-ul-Jihad_al-Islami), who had been arrested in India.

In January 2010 U.S. Defense secretary [Robert Gates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Gates), while on a visit to Pakistan, stated that al-Qaeda was seeking to destabilize the region and planning to provoke a nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

**Internet**

Timothy L. Thomas claims that in the wake of its evacuation from Afghanistan, al-Qaeda and its successors have migrated online to escape detection in an atmosphere of increased international vigilance. As a result, the organization's use of the Internet has grown more sophisticated, encompassing financing, recruitment, networking, mobilization, publicity, as well as information dissemination, gathering and sharing.



[Abu Ayyub al-Masri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ayyub_al-Masri)

[Abu Ayyub al-Masri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ayyub_al-Masri)’s al-Qaeda movement in Iraq regularly releases short videos glorifying the activity of jihadist suicide bombers. In addition, both before and after the death of [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Musab_al-Zarqawi) (the former leader of [al-Qaeda in Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_in_Iraq)), the umbrella organization to which al-Qaeda in Iraq belongs, the [Mujahideen Shura Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujahideen_Shura_Council_(Iraq)), has a regular [presence on the Web](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_presence). The range of multimedia content includes guerrilla training clips, stills of victims about to be murdered, testimonials of suicide bombers, and videos that show participation in jihad through stylized portraits of mosques and musical scores. A website associated with al-Qaeda posted a video of captured American entrepreneur [Nick Berg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nick_Berg) being decapitated in Iraq. Other decapitation videos and pictures, including those of [Paul Johnson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Johnson_(hostage)), [Kim Sun-il](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Sun-il), and [Daniel Pearl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Pearl), were first posted on jihadist websites.

In December 2004 an audio message claiming to be from Bin Laden was posted directly to a website, rather than sending a copy to [al Jazeera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aljazeera) as he had done in the past.

Al-Qaeda turned to the Internet for release of its videos in order to be certain it would be available unedited, rather than risk the possibility of al Jazeera editors editing the videos and cutting out anything critical of the [Saudi royal family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_royal_family). Bin Laden's December 2004 message was much more vehement than usual in this speech, lasting over an hour.

In the past, [Alneda.com](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alneda) and [Jehad.net](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jehad.net&action=edit&redlink=1) were perhaps the most significant al-Qaeda websites. Alneda was initially taken down by American [Jon Messner](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jon_Messner&action=edit&redlink=1), but the operators resisted by shifting the site to various servers and strategically shifting content.

The U.S. is currently attempting to extradite a British information technology specialist, [Babar Ahmad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babar_Ahmad), on charges of operating a network of English-language al-Qaeda websites, such as Azzam.com. Ahmad's extradition is opposed by various British Muslim organizations, such as the [Muslim Association of Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Association_of_Britain).

**Aviation network**

Al-Qaeda is believed to be operating a clandestine aviation network including “several [Boeing 727](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeing_727) aircraft”, [turboprops](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turboprops) and [executive jets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_jet), according to a [Reuters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reuters) story. Based on a U.S. [Department of Homeland Security](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_of_Homeland_Security) report, the story said that al-Qaeda is possibly using aircraft to transport drugs and weapons from South America to various unstable countries in West Africa. A Boeing 727 can carry up to 10 tons of cargo. The drugs eventually are smuggled to Europe for distribution and sale, and the weapons are used in conflicts in Africa and possibly elsewhere. Gunmen with links to al-Qaeda have been increasingly [kidnapping](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kidnapping) some Europeans for ransom. The profits from the drug and weapon sales, and kidnappings can, in turn, fund more militant activities.

**Alleged CIA involvement**

Main article: [Allegations of CIA assistance to Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegations_of_CIA_assistance_to_Osama_bin_Laden)

Experts debate whether or not the al-Qaeda attacks were [blowback](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blowback_(intelligence)) from the American CIA's "[Operation Cyclone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Cyclone)" program to help the Afghan [mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_mujahid_movement). [Robin Cook](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_Cook), British Foreign Secretary from 1997 to 2001, has written that al-Qaeda and Bin Laden were "a product of a monumental miscalculation by western security agencies", and that "Al-Qaida, literally 'the database', was originally the computer file of the thousands of mujahideen who were recruited and trained with help from the CIA to defeat the Russians."

[Munir Akram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munir_Akram), [Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permanent_Representative_of_Pakistan_to_the_United_Nations) from 2002 to 2008, wrote in a letter published in the [New York Times](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Times) on January 19, 2008:

The strategy to support the Afghans against Soviet military intervention was evolved by several intelligence agencies, including the C.I.A. and Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI. After the Soviet withdrawal, the Western powers walked away from the region, leaving behind 40,000 militants imported from several countries to wage the anti-Soviet jihad. Pakistan was left to face the blowback of extremism, drugs and guns.

A variety of sources—[CNN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNN) journalist [Peter Bergen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Bergen), [Pakistani ISI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inter-Services_Intelligence) Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf, and CIA operatives involved in the Afghan program, such as [Vincent Cannistraro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_Cannistraro)—deny that the CIA or other American officials had contact with the foreign mujahideen or Bin Laden, let alone armed, trained, coached or indoctrinated them.

Bergen and others argue that there was no need to recruit foreigners unfamiliar with the local language, customs or lay of the land since there were a quarter of a million local Afghans willing to fight; that foreign mujahideen themselves had no need for American funds since they received several hundred million dollars a year from non-American, Muslim sources; that Americans could not have trained mujahideen because Pakistani officials would not allow more than a handful of them to operate in Pakistan and none in Afghanistan; and that the Afghan Arabs were almost invariably militant Islamists reflexively hostile to Westerners whether or not the Westerners were helping the Muslim Afghans.

According to Bergen, known for conducting the first television interview with bin Laden in 1997, the idea that "the CIA funded bin Laden or trained bin Laden ...[is] a folk myth. There's no evidence of this. ... Bin Laden had his own money; he was anti-American and he was operating secretly and independently. ... The real story here is the CIA didn't really have a clue about who this guy was until 1996 when they set up a unit to really start tracking him." But Bergen conceded that, in one "strange incident," the CIA appeared to give visa help to mujahideen-recruiter [Omar Abdel-Rahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_Abdel-Rahman).

In his widely praised account of al-Qaeda, English journalist [Jason Burke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason_Burke) wrote:

It is often said that bin Laden was funded by the CIA. This is not true and, indeed, would have been impossible given the structure of funding that General Zia ul-Haq, who had taken power in Pakistan in 1977, had set up. A condition of Zia's cooperation with the American plan to turn Afghanistan into the Soviets' 'Vietnam' was that all American funding to the Afghan resistance had to be channeled through the Pakistani government, which in effect meant the Afghan bureau of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the military spy agency. The American funding, which went exclusively to the Afghan mujahideen groups, not the Arab volunteers, was supplemented by Saudi government money and huge funds raised from mosques, non-governmental charitable institutions and private donors throughout the Islamic world.

**Broader influence**

[Anders Breivik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anders_Behring_Breivik) was inspired by al-Qaeda, calling it "the most successful revolutionary movement in the world." While admitting different aims, he sought to "create a European version of al-Qaida."

**Criticism**



An Al Qaida recruit [dreams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream) about Osama bin Laden

According to a number of sources there has been a "wave of revulsion" against al-Qaeda and its affiliates by "religious scholars, former fighters and militants" alarmed by al-Qaeda's [takfir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takfir) and killing of Muslims in Muslim countries, especially Iraq.

[Noman Benotman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noman_Benotman), a former Afghan Arab and militant of the [Libyan Islamic Fighting Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libyan_Islamic_Fighting_Group), went public with an open letter of criticism to Ayman al-Zawahiri in November 2007 after persuading imprisoned senior leadership of his former group to enter into peace negotiations with the Libyan regime. While Ayman al-Zawahiri announced the affiliation of the group with al-Qaeda in November 2007, the Libyan government released 90 members of the group from prison several months later after "they were said to have renounced violence."

In 2007, around the sixth anniversary of the September 11 attacks and a couple of months before *Rationalizing Jihad* first appeared in the newspapers, the Saudi sheikh [Salman al-Ouda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salman_al-Ouda) delivered a personal rebuke to bin Laden. Al-Ouda, a religious scholar and one of the fathers of the Sahwa, the fundamentalist awakening movement that swept through Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, is a widely respected critic of jihadism. Al-Ouda addressed al-Qaeda's leader on television asking him

My brother Osama, how much blood has been spilt? How many innocent people, children, elderly, and women have been killed ... in the name of al-Qaeda? Will you be happy to meet God Almighty carrying the burden of these hundreds of thousands or millions [of victims] on your back?

According to Pew polls, support for al-Qaeda has been slightly dropped for parts of the Muslim world in the years before 2008. The numbers supporting suicide bombings in Indonesia, Lebanon, and Bangladesh, for instance, have dropped by half or more in the last five years. In Saudi Arabia, only 10 percent now have a favorable view of al-Qaeda, according to a December poll by Terror Free Tomorrow, a Washington-based [think tank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_tank).

In 2007, the imprisoned [Sayyed Imam Al-Sharif](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyed_Imam_Al-Sharif), an influential Afghan Arab, "ideological godfather of al-Qaeda", and former supporter of takfir, sensationally withdrew his support from al-Qaeda with a book [*Wathiqat Tarshid Al-'Aml Al-Jihadi fi Misr w'Al-'Alam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyed_Imam_Al-Sharif#Rationalizing_Jihad_in_Egypt_and_the_World) (*Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World*).

Although once associated with al-Qaeda, in September 2009 [LIFG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libyan_Islamic_Fighting_Group) completed a new "code" for jihad, a 417-page religious document entitled "Corrective Studies". Given its credibility and the fact that several other prominent Jihadists in the Middle East have turned against al-Qaeda, the LIFG's about face may be an important step toward staunching al-Qaeda's recruitment.

**See also**

* [Al Qaeda Network Exord](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Qaeda_Network_Exord)
* [Bin Laden Issue Station](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bin_Laden_Issue_Station) (former CIA unit for tracking Bin Laden)
* [Bosnian mujahideen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnian_mujahideen)
* [Fatawā of Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fataw%C4%81_of_Osama_bin_Laden)
* [List of designated terrorist organizations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_designated_terrorist_organizations)
* [Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muttahida_Majlis-e-Amal)
* [Operation Cannonball](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Cannonball)
* [Pakistan and state terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_and_state_terrorism)
* [Psychological warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_warfare)
* [Religious terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_terrorism)
* [Steven Emerson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Emerson)
* [Takfir wal-Hijra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takfir_wal-Hijra)
* [Terrorist organizations as destructive cults](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destructive_cult#Terrorism)
* [Videos of Osama bin Laden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Videos_of_Osama_bin_Laden)

**Publications:**

* [*Al Qaeda Handbook*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Qaeda_Handbook)
* [*Management of Savagery*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Management_of_Savagery)

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