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February 1991- July 1992: CIA Already Spying on Bin Laden in Sudan

The CIA monitors bin Laden in Khartoum, Sudan, where he has just moved (see Summer 1991). Billy Waugh, an independent contractor working for the CIA, moves to Khartoum and is given the task of spying on him. Waugh is a legendary fighter already in his sixties who has performed special operations for the US Army and CIA for many years and will continue to do so until he is in his seventies. The Associated Press will later report that Waugh "played a typecast role as an aging American fitness enthusiast and would regularly jog past bin Laden's home. He said he often came face-to-face with bin Laden, who undoubtedly knew the CIA was tailing him. Neither said anything, but Waugh recalled exchanging pleasantries with bin Laden's Afghan guards." [WAUGH AND KEOWN, 2004, PP. 121; ASSOCIATED PRESS, 6/4/2005] Waugh will later recall, "I was on a tracking team in Sudan keeping track of [bin Laden] in his early days as a possible terrorist network leader. Our CIA Chief of Station there told me upon arrival that [he] was one of our targets, that he was a wealthy Saudi financier and possible supporter of the terrorist outfit called al-Qaeda. He ran companies there and even owned an entire street block in the al-Riyadh section of the city.… At the time of our surveillance operations against him in 1991-92, [he] was not a particularly high priority, though evidence was gathering about him. At the time, it would have been very easy to take him out." Waugh also claims that he saw bin Laden "in the mountains of the Pakistan/Afghanistan border in the late 1980's when we were training the [mujaheddin] resistance." [JOURNAL OF COUNTERTERRORISM & HOMELAND SECURITY INTERNATIONAL, 6/2005]

Billy Waugh. [Source: Billy Waugh]

Entity Tags: Central Intelligence Agency, Billy Waugh, Osama bin Laden
Timeline Tags: Complete 911 Timeline

May 30, 1993: Term 'Al-Qaeda' First Mentioned in International Media

The term "al-Qaeda" is first mentioned in the international media. An article by the French wire service Agence France-Presse on this day entitled "Jordanian Militants Train in Afghanistan to Confront Regime" uses the term, although it is spelled "Al-Ka'ida." The article quotes a Jordanian militant who says he has been "trained by Al-Ka'ida, a secret organization in Afghanistan that is financed by a wealthy Saudi businessman who owns a construction firm in Jeddah, Ossama ibn Laden." (The spelling is the same in the original.) [WRIGHT, 2006, PP. 410] The term will not be mentioned in the US until August 1996 (see August 14, 1996).
Entity Tags: Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden
Timeline Tags: Complete 911 Timeline

Shortly Before February 1996: CIA Already Aware of Term 'Al-Qaeda' as It Sets Up Bin Laden Unit

David Cohen, head of the CIA's Directorate of Operations, wants to test the idea of having a "virtual station," which is a station based at CIA headquarters and focusing on one target. He chooses Michael Scheuer to run it. Scheuer is running the Islamic Extremist Branch of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center at the time and had suggested creating a station to focus just on bin Laden. The new unit, commonly called Alec Station, begins operations in February 1996 (see February 1996). The 9/11 Commission will later comment that Scheuer had already "noticed a recent stream of reports about bin Laden and something called al-Qaeda." [9/11 COMMISSION, 7/24/2004, PP. 109] It has been widely reported that US intelligence was unaware of the term al-Qaeda until after defector Jamal al-Fadl revealed it later in 1996 (see June 1996-April 1997). But Billy Waugh, an independent contractor hired by the CIA to spy on bin Laden and others in Sudan in 1991 to 1992, will later claim that the CIA was aware of the term al-Qaeda back then (see February 1991- July 1992). And double agent Ali Mohamed revealed the term to the FBI in 1993 (see May 1993). The term will first be used by the media in August 1996 (see August 14, 1996).

David Cohen. [Source: Ting-Li Wang / New York Times]

Entity Tags: Michael Scheuer, Counterterrorist Center, Central Intelligence Agency, Al-Qaeda, Alec Station, David Cohen
Timeline Tags: Complete 911 Timeline

August 14, 1996: Term 'Al-Qaeda' First Mentioned in US Media

Based on a review of the Lexis-Nexus database, the term al-Qaeda is first mentioned in the mainstream media on this day. A United Press International article draws from a State Department fact sheet released today (see August 14, 1996) and states, "Earlier, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Usama Bin Ladin drew on his family's wealth 'plus donations received from sympathetic merchant families in the Gulf region' to organize the Islamic Salvation Foundation, or al-Qaida. The group established recruitment centers in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan that enlisted and sheltered thousands of Arab recruits to fight the Soviets. 'This network remains active,' the State Department said." (The spelling is the same as in the original.) [US DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 8/14/1996; UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL, 8/14/1996] The term was first used in an overseas article by the French wire service Agence France-Presse, in May 1993 (see May 30, 1993). The CIA has been aware of the term since at least the start of 1996 (see Shortly Before February 1996) and possibly by 1991, if not earlier (see February 1991- July 1992). However, the term will remain little used and little understood by the media for the next several years. For instance, the New York Times will first mention it two years later in quoting the courtroom testimony of one of the plotters of the 1998 African embassy bombings (see 10:35-10:39 a.m., August 7, 1998). It is referred to as "al-Qaeda, an international terrorist group, led by Mr. bin Laden." [NEW YORK TIMES, 8/28/1998]
Entity Tags: US Department of State, Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden
Timeline Tags: Complete 911 Timeline

October 7, 1997: US Declares Abu Sayyaf and GIA Foreign Terrorist Organizations, But Not Al-Qaeda

The State Department officially designates the Abu Sayyaf a foreign terrorist organization. The Abu Sayyaf is a militant group in the Philippines with reported connections to bin Laden. Thirty groups are newly listed, including other groups associated with bin Laden, such as the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) in Algeria. [NEW YORK TIMES, 10/7/1997] However, al-Qaeda will not be so listed until 1999 (see October 8, 1999). Al-Qaeda is still relatively unknown; the name was first mentioned in the media in 1996 (see August 14, 1996).
Entity Tags: US Department of State, Al-Qaeda, Abu Sayyaf, Groupe Islamique Armé
Timeline Tags: Complete 911 Timeline

10:35-10:39 a.m., August 7, 1998: Al-Qaeda Bombs US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, Killing Over 200

Two US embassies in Africa are bombed within minutes of each other. At 10:35 a.m., local time, a suicide car bomb attack in Nairobi, Kenya, kills 213 people, including 12 US nationals, and injures more than 4,500. Mohamed al-Owhali and someone known only as Azzam are the suicide bombers, but al-Owhali runs away at the last minute and survives. Four minutes later, a suicide car bomb attack in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, kills 11 and injures 85. Hamden Khalif Allah Awad is the suicide bomber there. The attacks will be blamed on al-Qaeda. [PBS FRONTLINE, 2001; UNITED STATES OF AMERICA V. USAMA BIN LADEN, ET AL., DAY 38, 5/2/2001] The Tanzania death toll is low because, remarkably, the attack takes place on a national holiday so the US embassy there is closed. [MILLER, STONE, AND MITCHELL, 2002, PP. 195] The attack shows al-Qaeda has a capability for simultaneous attacks. The Tanzania bombing appears to have been a late addition, as one of the arrested bombers will allegedly tell US agents that it was added to the plot only about 10 days in advance. [UNITED STATES OF AMERICA V. USAMA BIN LADEN, ET AL., DAY 14, 3/7/2001] A third attack against the US embassy in Uganda does not take place due to a last-minute delay (see August 7, 1998). [ASSOCIATED PRESS, 9/25/1998] August 7, 1998, is the eighth anniversary of the arrival of US troops in Saudi Arabia and some people will speculate that this is the reason for the date of the bombings. [GUNARATNA, 2003, PP. 46] In the 2002 book *The Cell*, reporters John Miller, Michael Stone, and Chris Mitchell will write: "What has become clear with time is that facets of the East Africa plot had been known beforehand to the FBI, the CIA, the State Department, and to Israeli and Kenyan intelligence services.… [N]o one can seriously argue that the horrors of August 7, 1998, couldn't have been prevented." They will also comment, "Inexplicable as the intelligence failure was, more baffling still was that al-Qaeda correctly presumed that a major attack could be carried out by a cell that US agents had already uncovered." [MILLER, STONE, AND MITCHELL, 2002, PP. 195, 206] After 9/11, it will come to light that three of the alleged hijackers, Khalid Almihdhar, Nawaf Alhazmi, and Salem Alhazmi, had some involvement in the bombings (see October 4, 2001, Late 1999, and 1993-1999) and that the US intelligence community was aware of this involvement by late 1999 (see December 15-31, 1999), if not before.

Bombings of the Nairobi, Kenya, US embassy (left), and the Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, US embassy (right). [Source: Associated Press]

Entity Tags: Salem Alhazmi, Nawaf Alhazmi, Mohamed al-Owhali, Hamden Khalif Allah Awad, Khalid Almihdhar, Al-Qaeda, Azzam
Timeline Tags: Complete 911 Timeline