

The BBC, in an article published shortly after the 9/11 attacks, stated that bin Laden "received security training from the CIA itself, according to Middle Eastern analyst Hazhir Teimourian."^[1]

In a 2003 article, Michael Powelson of the Russian journal *Demokratizatsiya* wrote:

It is difficult to believe that the United States played no role in the operations of the son of one of the wealthiest men in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, it is much more likely that the United States knew full-well of bin Laden's operation and gave it all the support they could.^[2]

A 2004 BBC article entitled "Al-Qaeda's origins and links", the BBC wrote:

During the anti-Soviet jihad Bin Laden and his fighters received American and Saudi funding. Some analysts believe Bin Laden himself had security training from the CIA.^[3]

In a 2006 InDepth piece on Osama Bin Laden, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation published that,^[4]

Bin Laden apparently received training from the CIA, which was backing the Afghan holy warriors – the mujahedeen – who were tying down Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

An article in *Der Spiegel*, in 2007, entitled "Arming the Middle East", Siegesmund von Ilseman called Bin Laden "one of the CIA's best weapons customers." ^[5]

According to author Steve Coll,

Overall, the U.S. government looked favorably on the Arab recruitment drives. ... Some of the most ardent cold warriors at [CIA headquarters at] Langley thought this program should be formally endorsed and extended. ... [T]he CIA "examined ways to increase their participation, perhaps in the form of some sort of international brigade" ... Robert Gates [then-head of the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence] recalled. ... At the [CIA's] Islamabad station [station chief] Milt Bearden felt that bin Laden himself "actually did some very good things" by putting money into Afghanistan.^[6]

Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary in the UK from 1997–2001, and Leader of the House of Commons and Lord President of the Council from 2001-2003, believed the CIA had provided arms to the Arab Mujahideen, including Osama bin Laden, writing, "Bin Laden was, though, a product of a monumental miscalculation by western security agencies. Throughout the 80s he was armed by the CIA and funded by the Saudis to wage jihad against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan."^[7]

In conversation with former British Defence Secretary Michael Portillo, two-time Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto said Osama bin Laden was initially pro-American.^[8] Prince Bandar bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia, has also stated that bin Laden appreciated the United States help in Afghanistan. On CNN's Larry King program he said:^[9]

Bandar bin Sultan: This is ironic. In the mid-'80s, if you remember, we and the United - Saudi Arabia and the United States were supporting the Mujahideen to liberate Afghanistan from the Soviets. He [Osama bin Laden] came to thank me for my efforts to bring the Americans, our friends, to help us against the atheists, he said the communists. Isn't it ironic?



Robin Cook



Bandar bin Sultan

Larry King: How ironic. In other words, he came to thank you for helping bring America to help him.

Bandar bin Sultan: Right.

According to Iranian state-owned Press TV, FBI translator Sibel Edmonds, who has been fired from the agency for disclosing sensitive information, has claimed the United States was on intimate terms with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, using them to further certain goals in Central Asia.^[10]

According to author David N. Gibbs "a considerable body of circumstantial evidence suggests ... direct Agency support for Bin Laden's activities."^[11] Both Bin Laden and the CIA "held accounts in the Bank for Credit and Commerce International (BCCI)."^[11] "Bin Laden worked especially closely with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar"^[12] who Gibbs calls "the CIA's favored Mujahiddin commander".^[11] Gibbs quotes Le Monde as saying bin Laden was "recruited by the CIA" in 1979,^{[11][13]} Associated Press as saying a former bin Laden aide told them that in 1989 the U.S. shipped high-powered sniper rifles to a Mujahiddin faction that included bin Laden,^{[11][14]} and Jane's Intelligence Review as stating Bin Laden "worked in close association with U.S. agents" in raising money for the Mujahiddin from "vast family connections" near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.^{[11][15]}

In August 2010, Fidel Castro claimed that bin Laden was a spy, employed by the United States.^[16]

Opposing View

U.S. government officials and a number of other parties maintain that the U.S. supported only the indigenous Afghan mujahideen. They deny that the CIA or other American officials had contact with the Afghan Arabs (foreign mujahideen) or Bin Laden, let alone armed, trained, coached or indoctrinated them. Scholars and reporters have called the idea the CIA backed Afghan Arabs (foreign mujahideen) "nonsense",^[17] "sheer fantasy",^[18] and "simply a folk myth."^[19]

They argue that:

- with a quarter of a million local Afghans willing to fight there was no need to recruit foreigners unfamiliar with the local language, customs or lay of the land
- that with several hundred million dollars a year in funding from non-American, Muslim sources, Arab Afghans themselves would have no need for American funds
- that Americans could not train mujahideen because Pakistani officials would not allow more than a handful of them to operate in Pakistan and none in Afghanistan;^[20]
- that the Afghan Arabs were militant Islamists, reflexively hostile to Westerners, and prone to threaten or attack Westerners even though they knew the Westerners were helping the mujahideen.

Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri says much the same thing in his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*.^[21]

Bin Laden himself has said "the collapse of the Soviet Union ... goes to God and the mujahideen in Afghanistan ... the US had no mentionable role," but "collapse made the US more haughty and arrogant." ^[22]

According to CNN journalist Peter Bergen, known for conducting the first television interview with Osama bin Laden in 1997,

The story about bin Laden and the CIA — that the CIA funded bin Laden or trained bin Laden — is simply a folk myth. There's no evidence of this. In fact, there are very few things that bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and the U.S. government agree on. They all agree that they didn't have a relationship in the 1980s. And they wouldn't have needed to. Bin Laden had his own money, he was anti-American and he was operating secretly and independently. The real story here is the CIA did not understand who Osama was until 1996, when they set up a unit to really start tracking him.^[19]

Bergen quotes Pakistani Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf, who ran the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Afghan operation between 1983 and 1987:

It was always galling to the Americans, and I can understand their point of view, that although they paid the piper they could not call the tune. The CIA supported the mujahideen by spending the taxpayers' money, billions of dollars of it over the years, on buying arms, ammunition, and equipment. It was their secret arms procurement branch that was kept busy. It was, however, a cardinal rule of Pakistan's policy that no Americans ever become involved with the distribution of funds or arms once they arrived in the country. No Americans ever trained or had direct contact with the mujahideen, and no American official ever went inside Afghanistan.^[23]

Marc Sageman, a Foreign Service Officer who was based in Islamabad from 1987–1989, and worked closely with Afghanistan's Mujahideen, argues that no American money went to the foreign volunteers.



United States
Central
Intelligence
Agency



Ayman al
Zawahiri



Peter Bergen

Sageman also says:^[24]

Contemporaneous accounts of the war do not even mention [the Afghan Arabs]. Many were not serious about the war. ... Very few were involved in actual fighting. For most of the war, they were scattered among the Afghan groups associated with the four Afghan fundamentalist parties.

No U.S. official ever came in contact with the foreign volunteers. They simply traveled in different circles and never crossed U.S. radar screens. They had their own sources of money and their own contacts with the Pakistanis, official Saudis, and other Muslim supporters, and they made their own deals with the various Afghan resistance leaders."^[25]

Vincent Cannistraro, who led the Reagan administration's Afghan Working Group from 1985 to 1987, puts it,

The CIA was very reluctant to be involved at all. They thought it would end up with them being blamed, like in Guatemala." So the Agency tried to avoid direct involvement in the war, ... the skittish CIA, Cannistraro estimates, had less than ten operatives acting as America's eyes and ears in the region. Milton Bearden, the Agency's chief field operative in the war effort, has insisted that "[T]he CIA had nothing to do with" bin Laden. Cannistraro says that when he coordinated Afghan policy from Washington, he never once heard bin Laden's name.^[26]

Fox News reporter Richard Miniter wrote that in interviews with the two men who "oversaw the disbursement for all American funds to the anti-Soviet resistance, Bill Peikney - CIA station chief in Islamabad from 1984 to 1986 - and Milt Bearden - CIA station chief from 1986 to 1989 - he found,

Both flatly denied that any CIA funds ever went to bin Laden. They felt so strongly about this point that they agreed to go on the record, an unusual move by normally reticent intelligence officers. Mr. Peikney added in an e-mail to me: "I don't even recall UBL [bin Laden] coming across my screen when I was there."^[27]

Other reasons advanced for a lack of a CIA-Afghan Arab connection of "pivotal importance," (or even any connection at all), was that the Afghan Arabs themselves were not important in the war but were a "curious sideshow to the real fighting."^[28]

One estimate of the number of combatants in the war is that 250,000 Afghans fought 125,000 Soviet troops, but only 2000 Arab Afghans fought "at any one time".^[29]

According to Milton Bearden the CIA did not recruit Arabs because there were hundreds of thousands of Afghans all too willing to fight. The Arab Afghan were not only superfluous but "disruptive," angering local Afghan with their more-Muslim-than-thou attitude, according to Peter Jouvenal.^[30] Veteran Afghan cameraman Peter Jouvenal quotes an Afghan mujahideen as saying "whenever we had a problem with one of them [foreign mujahideen], we just shot them. They thought they were kings."

Many who traveled in Afghanistan — Olivier Roy,^[31] Peter Jouvenal.^[32] — reported of the Arab Afghans' visceral hostility to Westerners in Afghanistan to aid Afghans or report on their plight. BBC reporter John Simpson tells the story of running into Osama bin Laden in 1989, and with neither knowing who the other was, bin Laden attempting to bribe Simpson's Afghan driver \$500 — a large sum in a poor country — to kill the infidel Simpson. When the driver declined, Bin Laden retired to his "camp bed" and wept "in frustration."^[33]

Agreements

One allegation^[34] not denied by the US government is that the U.S. Army enlisted and trained a cashiered Egyptian soldier named Ali Mohamed, and that it knew Ali occasionally took trips to Afghanistan, where he claimed to fight Russians.^[35] According to journalist Lawrence Wright who interviewed U.S. officials about Ali, the Egyptian did tell his Army superiors he was fighting in Afghanistan, but did not tell them he was training other Afghan Arabs or writing a manual from what he had learned from the US Army Special Forces. Wright also reports that the CIA failed to inform other US agencies that it had learned Ali, who was a member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, was an anti-American spy.^[35]

Bergen and Wright also agree it is noteworthy that Islamist Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman was allowed into the United States, although Wright suggests this lapse was incompetent rather than sinister.^[36]

See also

- United States and state terrorism
- CIA activities in Afghanistan
- Blowback (intelligence)

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