



Al-Qaida and Europe: The Case of the German-Pakistani Aleem Nasir June 2009

**Ronald Sandee
Director of Analysis and Research
The NEFA Foundation**



[Over the past decade, Ron Sandee held a variety of positions within the Dutch Ministry of Defense, most recently acting as Senior Analyst in the Counter Terrorism branch of the Dutch Defense Intelligence Service's Counter Intelligence Department. In 2006, Ron moved to the U.S. and joined the NEFA Foundation as Director of Analysis and Research]

Aleem Nasir's Operations in Germany

The German-Pakistani Aleem Nasir was arrested by the Pakistani government attempting to fly back to Germany on June 18, 2007. Nasir had just completed his fourth trip to Pakistan since early 2006. During his trips, Nasir – who used the aliases Ziad ud-Din Punjabi, Muneeb (Moneeb), Abu Ismail, and Shams ud-Din¹ – couriered tens of thousands of Euros to al-Qaida leaders, and delivered night vision goggles and other supplies for al-Qaida.

In Germany, Nasir and Abu Omar al-Masri began raising money for the jihad in Kashmir and Afghanistan in 1999. Nasir then traveled to Pakistan to deliver €8,000 to both Sheikh Eisa al-Masri and his son Khalid al-Masri.² Sheikh Eisa al-Masri, who is also known as Abu Amro Abdul Hakim, is a Takfiri leader from Egypt who operates in Waziristan, Pakistan and is close to al-Qaida.³

After 9/11, Nasir lost his job and decided to emigrate with his family to Pakistan. Before he emigrated, Nasir stayed in close contact with radical Islamic circles in Germany. One of his close confidants was Egyptian cleric Dr. Yehia Mohamed Yousif.

Yousif came to Germany from Egypt in 1988 and received his doctorate in



Aleem Nasir and his mother; AFP

¹ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 27, 2007

² Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007

³ Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Egyptian Bombs Shake Muslim World," *Asia Times*, April 26, 2006; http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HD26Ak03.html; Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Al-Qaeda Goes Back to Base," *Asia Times*, November 4, 2005; http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/GK04Ak01.html

Medicine (Summa Cum Laude) in 1994 at the University of Freiburg.⁴ He became one of the most influential preachers on the German Islamic scene. Yousif's charisma made him appealing to young Muslims, including converts. Beginning in the mid-1990s, he developed a loyal following at the Multi Kultur Haus in Neu-Ulm, in the south of Germany.⁵

Among Yousif's followers were the young men from what later became known as the Sauerland Cell.⁶ The Sauerland Cell consisted mainly of German converts to Islam and radicalized Turkish Muslims from Germany. They were trained in Pakistan and instructed by the leadership of the Islamic Jihad Union to prepare for attacks in Germany. While preparing for an attack, the cell was dismantled by German authorities in early September 2007.⁷

According to a confidential document in the possession of the author, Yousif visited Aleem Nasir at his home and gave him a bundle of money, probably totaling more than €15,000.⁸ In 2005, Dr. Yousif left Germany.⁹

Before Yousif left, he and Nasir talked more than once about Yousif's son Omar. Yehia Yousif asked Nasir to facilitate a trip to a training camp for his son and it was Nasir who was able arrange for Omar to be trained in a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) training camp in Kashmir.¹⁰ When German law enforcement searched Omar Yousif's home, they discovered information on how to make explosives. After training in Kashmir, Omar attended another training camp in Indonesia. In the end, Omar Yousif was extradited from Germany to Egypt.¹¹

In the first half of 2002, Aleem Nasir emigrated with his family to Pakistan and stayed there for about a year. He went back to Germany to coordinate

⁴ Göran Schattauer and Sandra Zistl. "Um Gottes Willen," *Focus* nr. 28, July 9, 2007; http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/terror-um-gottes-willen_aid_225508.html

⁵ Gökalp Babayigit, "Islamisten in Süddeutschland. Knotenpunkt im islamistischen Netzwerk," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, September 6, 2007; <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/735/417501/text/>; Annette Ramelsberger, "Terrorgefahr in Deutschland. Junge Männer als Waffe," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, July 23, 2007; <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/885/398670/text/>; Marcel Rosenbach and Holger Stark, "The Bomb Plot. Terror from the German Heartland. Part 3: Joining the Jihad," *Der Spiegel*, April 9, 2008; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,576332-3,00.html>

⁶ Marcel Rosenbach and Holger Stark, "The Bomb Plot. Terror from the German Heartland. Part 3: Joining the Jihad," *Der Spiegel*, April 9, 2008; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,576332-3,00.html>

⁷ Ronald Sandee, "The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)," October 14, 2008, The NEFA Foundation p. 17-21; <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefaijuoct08.pdf>

⁸ Confidential document in the possession of the author

⁹ Annette Ramelsberger, "Terrorgefahr in Deutschland. Junge Männer als Waffe," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, July 23, 2007; <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/885/398670/text/>

¹⁰ E. Gujer, "Islamisten aus den Schwäbischen Provinz. Wie man von Ulm in terroristische Ausbildungslager gelangt," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, June 21, 2006; Ronald Sandee, "The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)," October 14, 2008, The NEFA Foundation pp. 17-18;

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefaijuoct08.pdf>

¹¹ Annette Ramelsberger, "Terrorgefahr in Deutschland. Junge Männer als Waffe," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, July 23, 2007; <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/885/398670/text/>

fundraising for the LeT in Germany and was involved in procurement for them. He bought rangefinders in Germany and brought them to Pakistan. He traveled to Pakistan as many as three to four times per year.¹²

In 2003, Nasir split with the LeT after the Pakistani government ordered the LeT to stop directly supporting the jihad in Afghanistan. The LeT had to comply with this order, especially after its leader, Hafiz Saeed, was put under house arrest. When Nasir visited Hafiz Saeed in his home, he was angry to learn that the LeT was no longer directly supporting the jihad (the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaida), but was using the funds raised abroad, including the money he delivered, for buying property and cars.¹³

Nasir decided to reach out to the jihadis himself, and, with help from former LeT members and operatives, he was able to make contact with the al-Qaida network in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan. In Germany, he began collecting money and buying supplies for fighters in Afghanistan. Al-Qaida couriers instructed Nasir in how to travel by bus from Lahore to Wana in Waziristan and meet at a particular place.¹⁴

After 9/11, Aleem Nasir stopped traveling in Germany and picking up the money to support the jihad himself, instead relying on two confidants of Turkish descent – Sermet Ilgen and Ömer Özdemir (also known as Abu Jabir al-Turki) – who brought the money collected in mosques to him.¹⁵

First Trip to Pakistan on Behalf of al-Qaida

In January 2006, Nasir traveled to Pakistan and met the Afghan Sikander, also known as Abdul Rehman, who brought him to Mir Ali in North Waziristan. Sikander arranged a meeting with Mustafa Abu Yazid in Mir Ali. Nasir handed €6,000 to Abu Yazid, who is known to be in charge of al-Qaida's finances.¹⁶

According to the Bosnian Nihad Cosic, a former member of the el-Mujahideen unit in Bosnia, all money received by al-Qaida from Europe is transferred to, and deposited in, a bank called Bayt al-Mal (House of Money) in Jani Khel. The money can only be released on Osama bin Laden's direction, and when such an order is given, it is Mustafa Abu Yazid who executes it.¹⁷ Abu Yazid is not only in charge of al-Qaida's finances, but he also serves as the overall leader of operations in Afghanistan and is number three within the organization's chain

¹² Confidential report in the possession of the author

¹³ Confidential report in the possession of the author

¹⁴ Confidential report in the possession of the author

¹⁵ Confidential reports in the possession of the author

¹⁶ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007. For more information on Mustafa Abu Yazid, see the NEFA Foundation dossier on him at

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefayazid0608.pdf>

¹⁷ Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, December 18, 2007

of command.¹⁸ At the request of Abu Yazid, Nasir bought and brought Fischer binoculars and night vision goggles to Waziristan.¹⁹

Abu Yazid introduced Nasir to Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi, who was described by Nihad Cosic as Hamza Rabia's successor; however, there is doubt about this claim.²⁰ Hamza Rabia became al-Qaida's head of external operations after Abu Faraj al-Libi's arrest in Mardan in May 2005. Rabia was targeted in a drone attack on November 30, 2005, but only died on December 25th following a second drone attack in the village Digan near the Afghan border.²¹ Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi was a senior al-Qaida commander and served as the conduit for new recruits in Waziristan, but he was not the head of al-Qaida's External Operations Unit. Al-Saudi was killed in November 2008 when a rocket fired from a Predator drone blew up the house in which he was staying in Bannu.²²

During this trip, Nasir also met with Abu Laith al-Libi and Omar Turki - probably an alias of Islamic Jihad Union leader Najmiddin Jalolov - and three other Turks.²³

Second Trip to Pakistan on Behalf of al-Qaida

In mid 2006, Aleem Nasir made another trip to Pakistan. This time he traveled alone to Mir Ali and from there went to the nearby village of Jani Khel in the Bannu district. During this time, Jani Khel might have been al-Qaida's headquarters, as al-Qaida's house bank, Bayt al-Mal, was housed there, as was the organization's Shura council.²⁴ In Jani Khel, Nasir again met with Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi and delivered money to him. Nasir asked al-Saudi to allow him to join a group engaged in fighting across the border in Afghanistan.²⁵

His request was honored and Nasir traveled with Abu Qatada al-Masri to Alwara Mandi in North Waziristan. In the Alwara Mandi camp, Nasir briefly met with Mustafa Abu Yazid. In the camp, he also met Zakaria Badawi. After ten to twelve days, Nasir was brought back to Jani Khel. There he was introduced to Imran, who took him to Karrak. From Karrak, Nasir traveled to Lahore, where he met with Sikander before returning to Germany.²⁶

¹⁸ Ronald Sandee, "Core Al-Qaida in 2008: A Review," April 8, 2009, The NEFA Foundation pp. 3-4; http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_AQin2008.pdf

¹⁹ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 27, 2007

²⁰ Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, December 18, 2007

²¹ Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, December 18, 2007

²² Ronald Sandee, "Core Al-Qaida in 2008: A Review," April 8, 2009, The NEFA Foundation p. 10; http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_AQin2008.pdf

²³ Ronald Sandee, "The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)," October 14, 2008, The NEFA Foundation p. 23; <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefaijuoct08.pdf>

²⁴ Syed Saleem Shahzad, Taliban a Step Ahead of US Assault, Asia Times, August 11, 2007; http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IH11Df01.html

²⁵ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007

²⁶ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007

Third Trip to Pakistan on Behalf of al-Qaida

In January 2007, Nasir again went to Pakistan. This time, Nasir brought rifle sights, a laptop, binoculars, several night vision devices, a device to detect bugs, a directional microphone to intercept conversations at a distance, and money.²⁷ He traveled to the Tribal Areas through Karrak and was taken by Imran to Jani Khel. There he met again with Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi and Khalid Habib.²⁸ Khalid Habib was al-Qaida's military chief and the fourth man in its chain of command. Habib was also responsible for operations in Pakistan. He was killed in October 2008 when a missile fired by a U.S. drone hit his car in a South Waziristan village.²⁹

Khalid Habib took Nasir to another compound where he was introduced to Abdul Rehman Hussein, also known as Abu Zubair al-Masri. Abu Zubair al-Masri (a.k.a. Abu Younis; a.k.a. Zubair Hilali) was born Hussein Hilal in Mödling, Austria in 1983.³⁰ He was an explosives expert and might have been Abu Jihad al-Masri's replacement as head of the External Operations Unit in late 2008. He was killed in November 2008 when missiles from a drone hit the house in which he was he staying.³¹

Abu Zubair took Nasir to another compound in Mir Ali where Nasir was introduced to Abu Yahya al-Libi, Saifullah al-Masri, some locals, and the Bosnian Nihad Cosic.³² According to his own statements, Cosic was one of the three main trainers in a camp where volunteers for suicide attacks from the European Union were being trained. The other two trainers were Sheikh Salim al-Jazairi and Salahuddin al-Tajiki. Cosic reported that until early 2007, there had been about 280 volunteers who were trained for suicide attacks abroad. Volunteers from inside the European Union received priority in training as they did not need a visa to enter the European Union. Notably, volunteers for suicide attacks were only trained in the use of explosives.³³

Cosic also explained the dissemination process when al-Qaida leadership would decide to order an attack abroad. The decision for an attack is made at the highest level by Osama bin Laden; when the decision is made, a message is given to the head of the External Operations Unit who encrypts it on a USB stick.

²⁷ Confidential report in the possession of the author; Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, December 18, 2007

²⁸ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007

²⁹ Ronald Sandee, "Core Al-Qaida in 2008: A Review," April 8, 2009, The NEFA Foundation p. 8; http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_AQin2008.pdf

³⁰ Staatsanwaltschaft Wien, BVT übn PWGT Austria 02.05.2007, 22.06.2006; Kurt Kuch, al-Qaida in Österreich, News, April 9, 2009, pp. 24-29; News, "Ihr in Österreich hattet viel Glück": Al-Qaida plante Terroranschläge auch bei uns!, http://www.news.at/articles/0916/10/241283_s1/ihr-oesterreich-glueck-al-qaida-terroranschlaege

³¹ Ronald Sandee, "Core Al-Qaida in 2008: A Review," April 8, 2009, The NEFA Foundation, p. 6; http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_AQin2008.pdf; Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 27, 2007

³² Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007

³³ Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, October 31, 2007

The stick is then brought to trusted middlemen in Karachi, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, or Quetta. Then the message is encrypted in Arabic for the internet and sent to the contact in the country where the attack is being planned. The contacts are only known to al-Qaida leadership. When a person becomes a contact, he receives a personal ID number which is given to him when he finishes his training and is ready to return to his home country. The encryption uses familiar cities, sites, and dates in Arab history. For instance, the Battle of Badr can mean an attack on an airport or the Battle of Uhud can mean an attack on a train station.³⁴

Nasir left Mir Ali with Abu Zubair, next traveling to Makeen in South Waziristan. There, they parted ways with Nasir heading to Wana to meet with Abdul Hameed Damashki.³⁵

Fourth Trip to Pakistan on Behalf of al-Qaida

In May 2007, Nasir was back in Pakistan and traveled via Karrak to Jani Khel. Imran picked him up and brought him to Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi. Nasir gave him €4,000 and went to meet Abu Zubair al-Masri, who instructed him to discontinue contact with an al-Qaida facilitator in Iran. He was told by Abu Zubair that Ömer Özdemir (a.k.a. Abu Jabir al-Turki; a.k.a. Omar Turki) had reached Pakistan and that he was being trained in Shaktoj, near Damadola. In the Abu Zubair compound in Mir Ali, Nasir also met with Bekkay Harrach (a.k.a. Abu Talha al-Maghrebi). Bekkay Harrach is a German citizen of Moroccan descent who trained in an al-Qaida training camp in Pakistan. Recently, al-Qaida's media outlet, As-Sahab, produced and released two videos – "A Bailout Plan for Germany" and "Islam and the Finance Crisis" – which featured Harrach speaking in German.³⁶

Jamal Afghani, Saif Filastini, Bilal, Abdul Rehman, and Sheikh Abdul Hameed were also staying in the same compound. Sheikh Abdul Hameed is better known as Abu Ubaidah al-Masri, who, at that time, was al-Qaida's head of external operations. Abu Ubaidah died of natural causes in December 2007.³⁷

Abu Zubair offered Nasir a course in explosives at a training camp³⁸ which normally lasted forty days, but an accident occurred during the training. Nasir attended a camp near the Afghan border where Cosic was one of the trainers. Nasir successfully made an explosive device containing 250 grams of Potassium Nitrate with Carbon. A second attempt to make a bomb containing Potassium

³⁴ Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, October 31, 2007

³⁵ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007

³⁶ Antje Kraschinski, Al-Qaida's "A Bailout Plan for Germany": A NEFA Analysis, February 10, 2009; http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_harrach0209.pdf. For translations of Harrach's two statements, see

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_harrach0309.pdf and

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefasahabgerman0109.pdf>

³⁷ Ronald Sandee, "Core Al-Qaida in 2008: A Review," April 8, 2009; NEFA Foundation, pp. 4-5;

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_AQin2008.pdf

³⁸ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007

Nitrate and Red Phosphorus went awry; while preparing the bomb an explosion occurred, injuring Nasir's right hand. Abu Ubaidah al-Masri brought the injured Nasir to a doctor in Miram Shah for treatment, and Nasir was asked to come up with a plausible cover story.³⁹ Abu Ubaidah also asked Nasir to take notes about the explosives course in German.

When Nasir attempted to return to Germany on June 18, 2007, he was arrested at the Lahore airport. Pakistani authorities were convinced there was a serious threat of an attack and that Nasir would be involved in that attack. It was unknown if there was a threat against Pakistan or Germany.⁴⁰

Recruits Traveling from Germany to Pakistan

Recruits traveling to Pakistan from Europe require preparation before they depart and, in general, need to be in contact with the right people. For instance, in most European countries, al-Qaida has facilitators and ringleaders. In Germany, for example, Aleem Nasir played an important role. After 9/11, he stopped personally collecting donations from mosques that were intended to support the jihad, as explained above; he used two trusted companions, Sermet Ilgen and Ömer Özdemir (a.k.a. Abu Jabir al-Turki).⁴¹ Both brought money and supplies (night vision goggles, army knives, rifle scopes, and binoculars) and were allowed to give Nasir names for suitable recruits.⁴² Nasir only chose three recruits to travel to Pakistan. Nasir and Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi agreed that all those who were being sent to Waziristan would have a letter of recommendation with them, written by Nasir.⁴³

The three recruits chosen by Nasir were Ömer Özdemir, Bekkay Harrach, and convert Renée Marc Sepac, who used the alias Muhammad Ali.⁴⁴ Özdemir received a letter of recommendation from Nasir, but traveled to Pakistan without informing Nasir that he was going. Before Özdemir actually went to Pakistan, Nasir discussed his situation with Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi. Both men agreed to use an al-Qaida facilitator in Zahedan, Iran, Yaseen al-Suri (a.k.a. Zein; a.k.a. Zain ud-Din). Abdullah Azzam al-Saudi gave Nasir a phone number and an email address for the purpose of setting up a travel route between Germany and Pakistan. Sepac went to Tehran, but Yaseen al-Suri never showed up, so he returned to Germany.⁴⁵ Bekkay Harrach (a.k.a. Abu Talha al-Maghrebi) made it to Pakistan, and, on one of his trips, Nasir met him in the Mir Ali compound of Abdul Rehman Hussain (a.k.a. Zubair al-Masri; a.k.a. Abu Younis), along with Abu Ubaidah al-Masri.⁴⁶

³⁹ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007; Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, October 31, 2007

⁴⁰ Confidential Source

⁴¹ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 29, 2007

⁴² Confidential report in the possession of the author

⁴³ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 27, 2007

⁴⁴ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 27, 2007

⁴⁵ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 27, 2007; Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 29, 2007

⁴⁶ Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 19, 2007; Pakistani Intelligence Report, ISI, June 29, 2007

The actual travel route went from Germany via Austria, Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece, to Turkey and Pakistan. Later the travel route was changed, routing individuals through Switzerland and Italy, to Greece and Turkey. In Italy, the recruits took a ferry to Greece. From Istanbul, one route went to Chechnya, another to Iraq, and the third one went to Afghanistan. The route from Istanbul to Pakistan went through Iran. The first leg of the route ended in Tehran where people were picked up in and brought to Zahedan.⁴⁷ In a January 2007 speech to his cadre, Osama bin Laden noted that numerous recruits who tried to enter through Pakistan were arrested, so he urged his cadre to open up new travel routes. Bin Laden himself asked them to reroute the track in Iran to Mashhad and from there to cross the border with Afghanistan.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The case of Aleem Nasir shows that the deep links between the LeT and al-Qaida. The link between these two organizations go back to the late 1980s when the founder of the LeT, Hafiz Saeed, was trained in a camp where Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Hanbali, and Janjalani (the founder of the Abu Sayyaf group) were active. As there has always been extensive contact between al-Qaida and the LeT, it is not surprising that when Nasir was looking to start up contact with al-Qaida, he could fall back on former LeT operatives. What is disturbing is how easy it was for Nasir to actually build up contacts with the senior al-Qaida leadership.

In Germany, Nasir was well connected in the radical Islamic scene and was able to set up a network which made it possible for him to maintain a low profile. If he was not al-Qaida's de facto point man for Germany, he certainly was one of the ringleaders for the group.

⁴⁷ Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, October 31, 2007

⁴⁸ Tuzilastvo-Tuziteljstvo BiH, Zapisnik O Saslusanju Svjedoka, KTZ-156/07, October 31, 2007