

Username:

Password:

- [New User? Start Here.](#)
- [Forget your password?](#)
-

SEARCH:

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Masthead](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Advertise!](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [TPM](#)



Special Features Block New

READER BLOGS
EVERYTHING UNDER
THE SUN

- [Election Central](#)
- [America Abroad](#)
- [Warren Reports](#)
- [Coffee House](#)
- [Discussion Tables](#)

FROM: TPMCAFE BOOK CLUB
TPMCAFE BOOK CLUB

[Excerpt: The Osama bin Laden I know](#)



By [Peter Bergen](#) | [bio](#)

The founding of al Qaeda marked an irrevocable split between bin Laden and his former mentor Abdullah Azzam. This split would have fateful consequences. Azzam advocated a concept of jihad that was essentially a traditional fundamentalist interpretation of the nature of jihad; the reclamation of once-Muslim lands from non-Muslim rule in places such as Palestine, what was then the Soviet Union, and even southern Spain, which had been under Muslim rule five centuries earlier.

The predominantly Egyptian militants who surrounded bin Laden at the end of the '80s advocated something more radical: the violent overthrow of governments across the Muslim world they deemed "apostate", a concept of jihad that Azzam and many of his followers rejected as they wanted no part in conflicts between Muslims. The split between Azzam and the ultra-jihadists around bin Laden may have even cost Azzam his life; he was assassinated by unknown assailants in November 1989, a year after al Qaeda had been secretly founded.

Osama bin Laden.

Abu Ubaidah al-Banjshiri established the training camps for our mujahideen against Russia's terrorism during the 1980s. We used to call the training camp al Qaeda. And the name stayed.



In March 2002, Bosnian authorities seized documents in the Sarajevo offices of Benevolence International Foundation, a Muslim charity long supportive of jihads around the world. They discovered a substantial number of electronic files and documents stored on a computer. One of the computer files was entitled "Tareekh Osama" ("Osama's History"), a collection of bin Laden's correspondence, minutes of meetings, and other documents, which details his activities during the Afghanistan jihad and the formation of al Qaeda in 1988. Some of these documents would be entered into evidence in the trial of Enaam Arnaout an employee of Benevolence International living in Chicago who pled guilty to charges of fraud in February 2003

In some circles it has become fashionable to suggest that bin Laden has not been especially significant to the global jihadist movement, or that al Qaeda has always, in

reality, been only a loose knit collection of like-minded Islamist militant groups, or even that al Qaeda is an organization that was fabricated by US law enforcement. The fullest exposition of this point of view was made in 2004 in the three-hour BBC documentary "The Power of Nightmares," directed by Adam Curtis, which argued that "Beyond his small group, bin Laden had no formal organization, until the Americans invented one for him."

Curtis claims that al Qaeda was first "invented" in 2001 when US prosecutors put four men involved in the 1998 plot to blow up two US embassies in east Africa on trial in New York. During the trial they drew heavily on the testimony of former bin Laden aide Jamal al-Fadl, who Curtis explains spun a story about the Saudi militant that would make it easier for US prosecutors to target bin Laden using conspiracy laws that had previously put Mafia bosses behind bars. Curtis says: "The picture al-Fadl drew for the Americans of bin Laden was of an all-powerful figure at the head of a large terrorist network that had an organized network of control. He also said that bin Laden had given this network a name, al Qaeda. 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 11th September, when he realized that this was the term the Americans had given it."

All of these assertions are nonsense. There is overwhelming evidence that al Qaeda was founded in 1988 by bin Laden and a small group of like-minded militants, and that the group would eventually mushroom into the secretive, disciplined, global organization dominated by bin Laden that implemented the 9/11 attacks. That evidence can be found in the documents in this chapter, which were recovered in Bosnia in 2002, and can also be found in the interviews throughout this book.

What follows are excerpts of a key document: The minutes of the first meeting about the establishment of al Qaeda on August 11, 1988. This document outlines the discussion between bin Laden, referred to as the "the Sheikh," and Abu Rida, or Mohamed Loay Bayazid, to discuss the formation of a "new military group," which would include "al Qaeda (the base)." Abu Rida refers to a disagreement with Abdullah Azzam, with whom bin Laden had founded the Mektab al Khidmat (Services Office).

TAREEKHOSAMA/50/Tareekh Osama 122 - 123

8/11/1988

Between Abu Al Rida and the Sheikh [bin Laden], a discussion regarding the establishment of the new military group --

--> general camp

--> special camp

--> Qaeda (base)

Abu Al Rida:

a. Did you take the opinion of Sheikh Abdullah [Azzam]

--> knowing that the Sheikh's military gang
has ended.

b. This future project is in the interest of the Egyptian brothers. (an apparent reference to Ayman al Zawahiri's Jihad group.)

The Sheikh (bin Laden): I am one person. We have not started an organization or an Islamic group. It was a period of one year and a half, it was a period of education, building energy, and testing the brothers who came. Starting all these matters, in the darkest of circumstances, and the period is very short, we took very huge gains from the people in Saudi Arabia. We were able to give political power to the Mujahideen; gathering donations in very large amounts.

- As for our Egyptian brothers: Their standing with us in the darkest of circumstances cannot be ignored. (another apparent reference to Ayman al Zawahiri's Jihad group).

Abu Al Rida:

We did not reach the primary goals and we did not follow the plan.

We did not expect the events that happened.

* Our work moves according to capability; we lost a lot of time.

In conclusion:

Abu Al Rida:

- a. Establishing a staged plan.
- b. Establishing a time-frame for this stage.

- Initial estimate, within 6 months of al Qaeda (the Base), 314 brothers will be trained and ready.

A week later there was a more formal discussion of the formation of al Qaeda. What follows are some of the minutes of a three-day meeting, starting August 18, 1988, in bin Laden's house. The participants, including bin Laden, Abu Ubaidah, al Qaeda's military commander and Abu Hajir, al Qaeda's religious advisor, established an advisory council and a list of requirements and an oath of allegiance for new members in al Qaeda.

TAREEKHOSAMA/54/Tareekh Osama 127 - 127a

In the Name of God, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful.

The brothers mentioned attended the Sheikh (bin Laden's) house. Most of the discussion was about choosing an Advisory Council. [There is also] a summary of what happened [with the] Maktab Al Khadamat (the Services Office). The meeting was held for two days in a row and the Advisory Council [met] on Friday, with the following brothers:

1. Sheikh Usama (bin Laden)
2. Abu Ubaidah Al Banjshiri (Al Qaeda's military commander)
3. Abu Burhan.
4. Sheikh Tameem.
5. Abu Hajir.
6. Abu Anas.
7. Abu Al Hasan Al Madani.
8. Abu Al Hasan Al Maki.

9. Abu Ibraheem.

The meeting [was] summarized in 2 points by the Sheikh [bin Laden]:

- The complaints.
- Mismanagement and bad treatment in Maktab Al Khadamat (the Services Office).

The Sheikh decided to engage the Council in making a change. The meeting stayed from sunset until two at night. And on Saturday morning, 8/20/1988, the aforementioned brothers came and started the meeting, and the military work was suggested to be divided in two parts, according to duration:

- Limited duration: They will go to Sada Camp, [a camp on the Afghan-Pakistan border] then get trained and distributed on Afghan fronts, under supervision of the military council.
- Open [ended] duration: They enter a testing camp and the best brothers of them are chosen to enter Al Qaeda Al Askariya (the Military Base).

Al Qaeda is basically an organized Islamic faction; its goal will be to lift the word of God, to make His religion victorious.

Requirements to enter Al Qaeda:

- Members of open duration (an apparent reference to an open-ended commitment).
- Listening and obedient.
- Good manners.
- Referred from a trusted side.
- Obeying statutes and instructions of Al Qaeda.

The pledge [to join al Qaeda]:

The pledge of God and his covenant is upon me, to listen and obey the superiors, who are doing this work, in energy, early-rising, difficulty, and easiness, and for his superiority upon us, so that the word of God will be the highest, and His religion victorious.

The meeting ended on the evening of Saturday, 8/20/19. Work of al Qaeda commenced on 9/10/1988, with a group of fifteen brothers, including nine administrative brothers.

Almost exactly thirteen years after al Qaeda was first launched on September 10, 1988 the organization carried out the 9/11 attacks.

Jamal Khalifa, bin Laden's brother-in-law, explains his theory why bin Laden, by all accounts, a humble, retiring, young man would have agreed to become the leader of the al Qaeda organization.

Especially when you come to a religious issue--Osama is very sensitive and he really likes to implement Islam. And he's very much at the same time afraid that if he does not God will punish him. He saw Abu Ubaidah, Abu Hafs in the battle--they were very brave, and they have [religious] knowledge. Abu Ubaidah is memorizing all the Koran, and when you see him most of the time, he is fasting, and in the night, he is praying the night prayer, which is very difficult. He is really a very good religious Muslim.

[Abu Ubaidah and Abu Hafs] came and they said, "Look, Osama, we are thousands of persons and we are a party. We have this background, we have this profile, and we saw that you are the leader which we can trust." In Islam we call it Baiyah-- "We appointed you as our leader and we will follow you." This is [my] theory. There is no other way to convince Osama to be a leader. He doesn't like being a leader, because he's a humble person, he's not a person who wants to show off at all.

[login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

Jan 18, 2006 -- 02:08 PM EST | [Tags](#):

Comment viewing options

Select your preferred way to display the comments and click "Save settings" to activate your changes.

On January 18, 2006 - 9:43pm [Ellen](#) said:

Whether or not its discovery was convenient or simply fortuitous, before we accept the "Bosnian hard drive" as authoritative, I think we'd need a good deal more information on the methods employed in its authentication.

I don't expect that analytic history to be set forth on this blog, but without it, there's no way to determine that we're not dealing with the "recollections" and/or the "embellishments" of the James Frey of Sarajevo.

[login](#) or [register](#) to post comments | [link](#) |

On January 19, 2006 - 1:20am [Sara](#) said:

Peter Bergan, you know Ellen is right on this -- and it is a huge burden that is forced on any author working in your field. There is so much disinformation -- misinformation and down right lies that have been floated, any consumer of open published information needs to approach it critically. I tend to give the Bosnian Hard Drive weight because it appears

material off it was used in court, meaning the bono fides of the material might have been subject to tests by defense counsel -- but that kind of verification needs to be commonplace.

Bosnia (and I might add, Kosovo) are in themselves interesting topics with regard to al-Qaeda and ones that have not received much historical focus. You read the biographical materials on European Muslims who went to Bosnia to fight, and you get the sense it was a life-changing experience. You read the American and British histories of Bosnia and Kosovo -- and little is really mentioned about the volunteer Euro-Islamists who dropped everything and went to fight. Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's efforts in former Yugoslavia need their authors and historians.

[login](#) or [register](#) to post comments | [parent](#) | [link](#) |

On January 22, 2006 - 3:06pm [pbergen](#) said:

The best source of information on the origins of al Qaeda comes from the founding documents of the organization itself. In March 2002, Bosnian authorities seized documents in the Sarajevo offices of Benevolence International Foundation, a Muslim charity long supportive of jihads around the world. The Bosnians discovered a substantial number of electronic files and documents stored on a computer. One of the computer files was entitled "Tareekh Osama" ("Osama's History"), a collection of bin Laden's correspondence, minutes of meetings, and other documents, which details his activities during the Afghanistan jihad and the formation of al Qaeda. Those documents were entered into evidence in the Chicago trial of Enaam Arnaout, an employee of Benevolence International who was convicted of racketeering in 2003. The prosecutor in the case was Patrick Fitzgerald who prosecuted several important terrorism cases in New York in the 1990s and is presently the well-regarded special prosecutor in the Valerie Plame leak case. Fitzgerald has certified the authenticity of the documents retrieved in Bosnia.

[login](#) or [register](#) to post comments | [parent](#) | [link](#) |

On January 19, 2006 - 9:31am [KKNY](#) said:

Almost exactly thirteen years after al Qaeda was first launched on September 10, 1988 the organization carried out the 9/11 attacks.

It's disconcerting to know that an organization such as al Qaeda operated basically unimpeded for thirteen years. Makes me wonder how many people this "Mary Kay of the terrorism business" recruited and trained during that time. How many evil seeds has he sown? Add to that happy thought the fact that these are very patient people, willing to wait years to achieve their goals and the nearly 5 years of inactivity on their part against the US since the attacks on NY and DC don't seem so encouraging.

[login](#) or [register](#) to post comments | [link](#) |

On January 20, 2006 - 1:30am [irishkg](#) said:

Peter - Wasn't sure how I would like the format but having read 4 chapters so far I like it. The lead-ins give me enough information to keep track of who is who and I like hearing the real voices of those speaking (vs. cleaning up the language and grammar). Thks.

[login](#) or [register](#) to post comments | [link](#) |

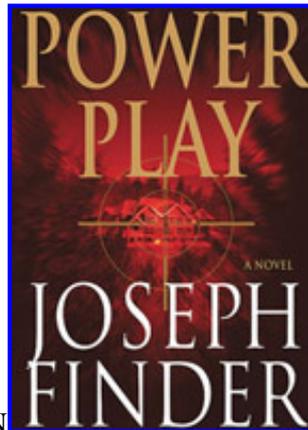
Comment viewing options

Select your preferred way to display the comments and click "Save settings" to activate your changes.

Advertisers

[Advertise here](#)

[Advertise here](#)



- THE ULTIMATE SEDUCTION [Pre-order](#) the pulse-pounding new thriller from NYT Bestseller [Joseph Finder](#) and get a free copy of **Killer Instinct**, named 2007 Thriller of the Year by the International Thriller Writers!

Jet-propelled

Janet Maslin, NYT

Explosive

Entertainment Weekly

A master of the modern thriller

Boston Globe

[Advertise here](#)

[Home](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Art Credit: Bridgeman Art Library International

Copyright © 2006 TPM Media LLC. All Rights Reserved