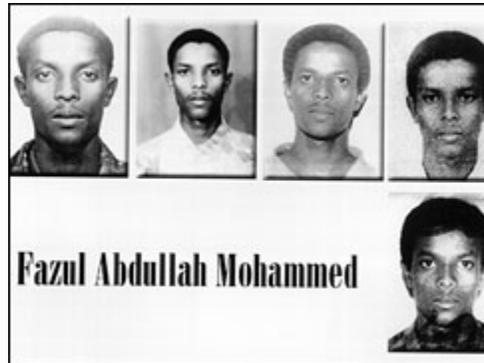


Abdullah Muhammad Fazul



Childhood and Adolescence¹

Abdullah Muhammad Fazul Husseine Mullah Ati² (Arabic: عبد الله محمد فاضل حسين ملا اتي) was born in the district of Magoudjou³ in the town of Moroni, the capital city of Grande Comore, the largest of the four⁴ Comoros Islands, a tiny former French colony off the northeastern coast of Mozambique. Though he has used February 25, 1974 and December 25, 1974 as dates of birth on various documents, it is likely that his true date of birth is August 25, 1972, a date also used in some documents.⁵ He was the youngest of six children, and his parents separated during his infancy over his father's decision to take a second wife. Not long after in 1975, the Comoros declared its independence from France, and it has been politically and economically unstable ever since. There have been no fewer than nineteen coups or attempted coups on the islands since independence, and lacking any natural resources or industries, the tiny nation is extremely poor.⁶ There are no post-secondary educational institutions on the islands, and all who would seek higher learning must do so overseas.

¹ The following sketch of Fazul's early life is based on information derived from these sources: Hirschorn, "Elusive Al Qaeda Operative"; McNeil, "Assests of a Bombing Suspect"; "On the Trail of Man Wanted for Bomb Blast"; Vick, "FBI Trails Embassy Bombing Suspect"; "What Turns a Boy into a Terrorist?"

² Name at birth from wanted poster here: <http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/index.cfm?page=Fazul>. In the autobiographical document described in "On the Trail of Man Wanted for Bomb Blast," Fazul gives his name at the beginning of the document as follows: "Abdullah Muhammad, a.k.a. `Ali Fadir Husayn Mulla Ati, a.k.a. Harun Fazul."

³ "On the Trail of Man Wanted for Bomb Blast." *The Nation* (Nairobi), May 13, 2006.

⁴ In addition to the three islands under its current jurisdiction, the Comoran government lays claim to the island of Mayotte, though the latter is currently a French overseas territory.

⁵ Hirschorn, "Elusive." His current age is almost invariably cited in media reports in accordance with the '72 birthdate – e.g., recent reporting (early 2007) on Fazul gives his age as being 34. When referring to his early life, however, different writers give different ages for significant events – thus, different sources give his age when first travelling to Pakistan as somewhere between 14 and 18, with a plurality of sources citing 16. This variance is probably due to the different dates of birth used by Fazul in various documents.

⁶ "Comoros," *C.I.A. World Factbook*, < <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cn.html> > Accessed 20 February 2007.

In relative terms, Fazul's family appear to have been among the small middle class of Moroni. One of Fazul's sisters owned a clothing shop on Magoudjou Street in Moroni and his uncle Sagaff Abdullah had a mattress shop on the same street, opposite the largest hospital in the Comoros. Fazul's father was a well-known and respected preacher in the islands. Several of the members of Fazul's father's family moved to Pakistan in the 1970s; such a move would have been far beyond the means of most of the islands' inhabitants. The Moroni home of Fazul's late mother (d. 1997), where Fazul lived during his childhood, is described as "a sizable masonry home in a neighborhood where other houses are made of galvanized tin or palm leaves."⁷ In a home video taken when Fazul was fifteen years old, one can see that he and the other people in the video are well-dressed-Harun wears slacks and a button-up shirt-and that the home is well-appointed; women and men are visible mingling together at the gathering, and none of the women wear any kind of head covering.⁸ This provides some indication that the maternal branch of Fazul's immediate family was Islamically liberal, which is true of the majority of Comoran Muslims.⁹

Fazul had close and enduring relationships with his family, with the exception of his father; interviewed at his apartment in central Moroni in 1998, his father claimed to have rarely seen his son since childhood.¹⁰ Throughout his adult life, Fazul made frequent trips home to visit with his mother's family as well as that of his father-in-law, who is Fazul's paternal uncle. Fazul wrote letters to his family as well, and in at least one letter to his brother Omar, who is five years older, he frankly discussed his turn to Islamist terrorism. In 1996, Fazul paid for his mother to be flown to Paris for cancer treatment; on the very day of the embassy bombings, 7 August 1998, Fazul arranged for his father-in-law to be flown from a hospital in Nairobi back to Moroni.¹¹ Despite the fact that he has constantly been on the move since joining al-Qa'ida, Fazul has managed to keep his wife and children with him for much of the time.

As a child and young teen, Fazul appears by all accounts to have been precocious but otherwise normal. He played soccer and the flute, enjoyed dancing to popular music-several people remembered him dancing like Michael Jackson-and liked to show off his prowess at twirling around kung fu fighting sticks. When playing with others he

⁷ Vick, "FBI Trails."

⁸ "What Turns a Boy Into a Terrorist?"

⁹ The Comoros Islands are 98% Sunni Muslim, though it is common to see women in public there without any head coverings. Qat and alcohol are available in shops, and Islamist parties have consistently done miserably at the polls in the elections that have punctuated the many Comoran coups. Local people interviewed about Fazul generally view him as a villain, and the traditional Muslim leadership there has expressed alarm and disapproval at the Saudi-funded incursion of Wahhabism there. The islands' grand mufti stated in 1998, referring to Hasan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front, which had offered "scholarships" to Comorans for study at madarasas abroad since the mid-1980s, "We are openly against this organization. They are looking for people who are not well in the mind, who are poor, who need new visions" (Vick, "FBI Trails Embassy Bombing Suspect").

¹⁰ Vick, "FBI Trails Embassy Bombing Suspect."

¹¹ Fazul's father-in-law died soon thereafter; already in the late stages of a terminal illness, he died of injuries sustained when Comoran police tipped him out of his bed during a search following the embassy bombings.

sometimes pretended to be James Bond. In other words, he was exposed to and enjoyed the kind of Western cultural productions that are anathema to Salafis.

Fazul received a traditional Islamic education in his early years. At the age of four he began basic Qur'an studies with an uncle and at seven began attending the madrasa of Fundi¹² Twawilou Abdulfateh. By age 9 he had memorized much of the Qur'an and began in this year to appear on Radio Comoros, reading instructions on prayer and other Islamic matters prepared by his Qur'an teacher. At 13, he began to read instructions and advice on the radio that he prepared himself. By this point, Fazul had learned Swahili, Comorian (related to Swahili), French and Arabic, and had had a good deal of exposure to English as well. As an adult he would become fluent in all of these tongues.

His first madrasa teacher, Fundi Twawilou, remembers Fazul fondly, recalling that he was exceptionally bright; Fazul was two levels ahead of one of his sisters, though she was the elder by several years. But Fundi Twawilou also saw the beginnings of Fazul's propensity for violence. He recalls that Fazul often had bouts of rage; he would pick fights with older boys on the soccer field, and sometimes administered his own corporal punishment to classmates for mistakes in reciting the Qur'an, slamming them down in their chairs. At the local French-language public school, Fazul was expelled for striking his French teacher. At age 11, he cut the ear of one of Fundi Twawilou's charges for making a mistake in Qur'an recitation and the teacher asked Fazul to leave the school.¹³

At this point, Fazul began attending the classes of an older teacher, Fundi Muhammad Ali, who remembers Fazul as "brilliant, respectful to others, deeply religious and very calm."¹⁴ Friends who knew him in these years generally corroborate this view. One former schoolmate recalls that Fazul was "a bit reserved. In fact, a recluse of sorts. Only arguments on matters of religion seemed to interest him. Then he could argue with heated passion."¹⁵ Another former classmate and congregant at the same mosque that Fazul frequented remembers his unusual intelligence and breadth of knowledge – he said that Fazul "knew more than the average Comoran boy," and that he "was always quoting this or that philosopher or 'religious leader'" – but also "his bitterness about the tumultuous politics of the islands." Saying that Fazul was an "unhappy young man who was always complaining," this person remembers Fazul as being a fierce critic of the French and of the founding president of the independent Comoros, Ahmed Abdullah.¹⁶

¹² "Fundi" is Swahili for a skilled person, expert, or teacher, in this instance roughly equivalent to the Arabic "sheikh."

¹³ McNeil, "Assesses of a Bombing Suspect." Elsewhere in the same article McNeil describes this event in slightly different terms; he calls Fazul a "brilliant student of the Koran who was thrown out of religious school for caning a lazy pupil hard enough to draw blood."

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "On the Trail of Man Wanted for Bomb Blast."

¹⁶ Ibid.

This angry interest in domestic politics is evident in the letter that Fazul wrote to his brother Omar in 1991.¹⁷

Radicalization

Though clearly religious in childhood, there are no indications that Fazul held radical or even particularly conservative beliefs up to this point.¹⁸ This definitely changed, however, when Fazul, at age 16, left the tutelage of Fundi Muhammad Ali for that of Soidiki M'Bapandza, the islands' most prominent Salafi/Wahhabi sheikh. Fundi Soidiki, who was once a leader of an Islamist opposition party in the Comoros, runs a number of madrasas in the Hadoudja district of Moroni that teach a Saudi-designed curriculum in place of the government-approved curriculum taught at the other Comoran madrasas. Unlike the other madrasas, at Soidiki's school the sexes are strictly segregated and girls must fully cover their heads. The local Muslim establishment expresses suspicion about Soidiki and his school; he and his students do not attend the public mosques or join the wider community in religious festivals, and it is well known on the islands that he is supported by Saudi money. In fact, soon after Fazul enrolled in Soidiki's school it began to receive financing from the al-Haramayn Foundation,¹⁹ an organization which was functionally an extension of al-Qa'ida, and one with which Fazul would work closely on a number of occasions in his subsequent career as an al-Qa'ida operative. This was one of the earliest financing ventures of the organization outside of South Asia, and began even before al-Haramayn moved its headquarters from Karachi to Riyadh in 1992.

Fazul apparently spent two years studying with Soidiki. His future wife also studied at the school, though on account of their age difference they did not attend the madrasa at the same time. At age 18, at the end of his course of study with Soidiki, Fazul received a scholarship to study abroad. It may be that this money came from al-Haramayn, though a Comoran official and members of Fazul's family told one reporter in 1998 that the money had come from a Sudanese group called *al-Jabha*, or "The Front," which is very likely none other than the National Islamic Front (*al-Jabha al-Islamiyya al-Qawmiyya*) of Hassan al-Turabi, which in the following year would become the host of Osama bin Laden.²⁰ Either way, Fazul would have been traveling on al-Qa'ida-connected money.

¹⁷ Fazul refers in that letter to four Comoran politicians, one of whom (Moustoifa Said Cheikh, leader of the Front Démocratique des Comores) he claims attempted to encompass the death of his teacher Soidiki, and implies his desire to kill these men. When police searched the Fazul family home in Moroni in Sept. 1998 they found a "list of prominent Comorans who would have to be killed to make way for fundamentalist rule" (McNeil, "Assets of a Bombing Suspect").

¹⁸ In the autobiographical manuscript described in "On the Trail of Man Wanted for Bomb Blast," however, Fazul says that he knew what he wanted to do from a very young age. One might also consider his response to classmates who mispronounced words from the Qur'an as an early indication of his willingness to turn to violence in defence of Islam.

¹⁹ Pérouse de Montclos, Profile of the al-Haramayn Foundation.

²⁰ Vick, "FBI Trails Embassy Bombing Suspect." This information is somewhat dubious, however, since these same sources told Vick that the money was for study *in* Sudan, and that Fazul went to study there. There is no doubt that Fazul went to Pakistan on his scholarship, *not* Sudan, though he may have told some people he was going to Sudan to hide his intentions to join the jihad in Afghanistan. In his letter to his

Given Soidiki's profile and his financial connections with al-Qa'ida-affiliated organizations, it is probable that Fazul's radicalization occurred while studying with this teacher. In his 1991 letter to his brother Omar as well as in the autobiographical manuscript discovered by police in 2005, Fazul clearly indicates that he brought his radical beliefs with him when he first left for Pakistan.

Joining al-Qa'ida

Fazul flew to Karachi, Pakistan in 1990, soon after the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan. He enrolled as a medical student in an un-named Pakistani university, switched almost immediately to Islamic studies, and was recruited before the end of his first year of studies to train to become a *mujahid* (holy warrior) in Afghanistan. He does not name the person who connected him to the mujahidin, but within his first year in Pakistan he found himself at the Bayt al-Ansar in Peshawar, founded by Osama bin Laden and `Abdullah `Azzam. Fazul writes that he saw both of these men lecture at the Bayt al-Ansar during his time there.²¹ This was the first "guest-house" that foreign fighters would stay at in Peshawar before being taken to a first-level training camp in Afghanistan. Those who stood out in the initial training would be invited to receive more advanced training at further camps. Fazul was selected in this manner and given two months of training in small arms, heavy weapons, explosives and bomb-making, surveillance evasion, guerrilla warfare and even "how to kill a president in full view while he's with his bodyguards."²² Among his trainers was Ali Abdelsoud Mohammad, the former major in the Egyptian army who later joined the U.S. Army and attempted to infiltrate the FBI and CIA as a double agent; Ali admitted to having trained Fazul in 1991 and 1992.²³

In his 1991 letter to his brother Omar, Fazul says that he has "joined their group," that he "got confirmed" with al-Qa'ida. It was not long before he was given his first mission – help train the Somali Islamist militias that were opposing the United Nations intervention there.²⁴ This was in early spring of 1993, and Fazul was sent with a larger group of operatives that included Ali A. Mohammad, Abu Ubayda al-Banshiri, Mohammad Sadiq Odeh, Muhammed Atef, and Saif al-Adel. Ali Mohammad was sent to Nairobi to case targets, and the U.S. Embassy there was identified as a future target at this time.²⁵ In his 1997 report on the East Africa al-Qa'ida cell, Fazul refers to the fact that this team sent to Somalia in 1993 was directly involved in the so-called Battle of Mogadishu of October '93, during which two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters were shot

brother Omar, he asks that Omar not tell the rest of the family that he's in Afghanistan, writing that "it is totally normal in the face of God to lie – it is for the good of Muslims."

²¹ "On the Trail of Man Wanted for Bomb Blast."

²² Fazul, letter to his brother Omar, 1991.

²³ Weiser, "U.S. Charges Ex-Soldier"; on Ali Mohammad, see Wright, *The Looming Tower*, pp. 179ff.

²⁴ *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(9) 98 Cr. 1023, Indictment, pp. 16f.

²⁵ International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia," p. 7.

down and 18 U.S. soldiers were killed.²⁶ The Somali group that these al-Qa'ida operatives worked most closely with was al-Ittihad al-Islami, which was partly funded by the al-Haramayn Foundation.²⁷ The leadership of this group went on to lead the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC, a.k.a. Islamic Courts Union), which recently controlled much of Somalia and offered refuge to al-Qa'ida; in January of 2007 the CIC was routed by the Ethiopian Army, with support from the U.S.

The following year Fazul returned briefly to the Comoros. He asked his father to take him to his uncle's house on one of the other islands. Fazul asked his uncle for his cousin Halima's hand in marriage; Halima was 17 at the time, was still studying at Soidiki's madrasa, and had never met Fazul before then. In her deposition to a Comoran magistrate, Halima gives the date of their marriage as April 4, 1994. Three weeks later they moved to Kenya, remaining there until December of that year; at this time Fazul assumed the pseudonym Haroun Fazul. Also in 1994, Fazul accompanied Wadih al-Hage, who was working as Osama bin Laden's secretary in Khartoum, to the wedding in Mombasa of Mohammad Siddiq Odeh. These three would later be part of the cell that organized and carried out the bombings of the Kenyan and Tanzanian U.S. Embassy in 1998.

1994-1998: Bombing the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi

The embassy bombings took nearly five years of preparation and planning, and Fazul was centrally involved at every step along the way. Following Ali Mohammad's target-identification activities in Nairobi, an apartment was rented there in January of 1994; Fazul lived there for much of the year, and his new wife Halima joined him in May. Fazul was a relatively low-level al-Qa'ida operative at this stage and would remain so until after the embassy bombings. He was directed by Wadih al-Hage and Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, and, beginning with his 1997 promotion to media and communications officer for the East Africa cell, he communicated with the al-Qa'ida high command via the London-based Khalid al-Fawwaz.²⁸

At the end of 1994 Fazul moved his family to Khartoum, joining the contingent of al-Qa'ida families that had relocated there from South Asia with Osama bin Laden. From this point to the spring of 1996 Fazul moved relatively frequently between Khartoum, Nairobi and Mogadishu, undertaking a variety of tasks related to the plot. Travel between these points was facilitated by the existence of an underground transportation network used in the movement of qat (also spelled khat), a plant chewed for its narcotic properties.²⁹ In Nairobi he worked under the cover of a bogus charity founded there by

²⁶ In that report Fazul writes that his cell is likely in danger of being targeted by agents of the U.S. "since America knows well that the youth who lived in Somalia and were member's of the Shaykh's [sc. Usama's] cell are the ones who killed the Americans in Somalia."

²⁷ International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia," pp. 2ff.; Pérouse de Montclos, Profile of the al-Haramayn Foundation.

²⁸ Fazul refers to his appointment to this position by Fawwaz in his 1997 report.

²⁹ *Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack*, p. 45. Odeh testified in U.S. court that he traveled between Nairobi and Mogadishu on the airplanes of qat smugglers. Because qat must be chewed within days of harvest for the active ingredient to work, the smuggling infrastructure has to be quick and reliable.

Wadih al-Hage with the morbidly ironic name of Help Africa People. The Nairobi cell also worked very closely with Mercy International Relief Agency, an organization run by the Salafi ideologue Safar al-Hawali, and the Nairobi branch of the al-Haramayn Foundation; both of these groups supported the Ittihad al-Islami group.³⁰ Fazul also had courier responsibilities, ferrying money between different members of the African cells; Fazul carried money from Abu Ubayda al-Banshiri to several members of the Nairobi group at various times.³¹ In 1996 he and Wadih al-Hage transported \$7,000 from Osama to a contact in Mombasa.³² Key leaders of al-Ittihad al-Islami (and later of the Somalian Council of Islamic Courts), including Hassan Dahir Aweys and Hassan Turki, were also involved in the preparations, and helped provide shelter, identity and travel documents and access to the massive Somalian arms market.³³

In May of 1996, when al-Qa'ida closed up shop in Sudan and Osama returned to Afghanistan, Fazul returned with his wife to the Comoros; around this time their first child was born, a daughter whom they named Afiya.³⁴ Fazul stayed for most of May before returning to Kenya, and his family joined him there later that summer.³⁵ Fazul's early return was eventuated by the 21 May sinking of a steamship on Lake Victoria, one of whose passengers was senior al-Qa'ida military commander Abu Ubayda al-Banshiri (a.k.a. Adel Habib). Joined by Wadih al-Hage and other operatives, Fazul stayed in Mwanza, Tanzania for several days to confirm that Banshiri had died, and then reported the news back to Osama.

In 1997 things became more difficult for the Nairobi cell. Fazul wrote during that summer that Osama's declaration of war upon America put the cell at serious risk of capture, and complained that he had had to learn of it from CNN.³⁶ He also wrote of his alarm at seeing a CNN report about the capture of an al-Qa'ida operative close to bin Laden; Fazul correctly believed this person to be Abu al-Fadl al-Makki, though he was not thus identified in the press. In response to this, Fazul gathered Wadih al-Hage's files and hid them somewhere in Nairobi.³⁷ Also that summer, the FBI raided Wadih al-Hage's home, seizing a large amount of digital and paper data, but due to lack of Arabic-speaking resources, the material was left mostly untranslated. Around the same time, the CIA raided the Nairobi offices of the al-Haramayn Foundation, but soon thereafter the agency dropped its investigation.³⁸

³⁰ International Crisis Group, "Counter-terrorism in Somalia," p. 7.

³¹ *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(7) 98 Cr. 1023, S.D.N.Y., testimony of Sikander Juma (a.k.a. Ashkaf Hussein), trial transcript of day 31, April 18, 2001, p. 4287.

³² *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(9) 98 Cr. 1023, Indictment, p. 23.

³³ International Crisis Group, "Counter-terrorism in Somalia," pp. 7f.

³⁴ They had a son (Lukman) the following year and another daughter (Sumeiya) in 2002.

³⁵ Halima Fazul, deposition.

³⁶ Fazul, August 1997 letter to "brother Sharif."

³⁷ Details about the contents of these files can be found in *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(9) 98 Cr. 1023, Indictment, p. 28.

³⁸ *Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack*, p. 30.

After these near misses, the cell went ahead with the execution of the bombing plot. Fazul made frequent trips between Nairobi and Khartoum during this period.³⁹ On May 1, with the help of a local named Sikander Juma, Fazul rented a large walled villa in the suburbs of Nairobi, at 43 New Runda Estates. Though he told the property owner (one Tamarra Ratemo) that he needed the large house for his family and business guests, in fact his family lived with the Jumans and at Wadih al-Hage's home in Nairobi; the villa was used as the bomb factory for the Nairobi embassy bombing. Throughout the spring and summer, Fazul was one of the key players in the lead-up to the bombing, and on the morning of August 7, 1998, he drove a white pick-up truck ahead of the bomb truck to the embassy. At 10:45 AM local time, two vehicle-borne bombs were detonated outside the U.S. Embassy, killing 224 and wounding more than 4000 people. Later that day Fazul arranged for his family and father-in-law to fly to the Comoros, and that evening he arranged for the keys of the villa to be handed over to the owner, having already hired local people to clean it out. He stayed on in Nairobi for another week, and on August 14 flew to the Comoros; on the 22nd he left the Comoros for Dubai and from there most likely proceeded to Pakistan.⁴⁰

The leadership of the East African cell up to this point had been provided by Wadih el-Hage and then, after al-Hage's return to the U.S. in 1997, Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah. On August 1, 1998, the latter directed all al-Qa'ida personnel to leave Kenya by the 6th of that month. This provides an indication of Fazul's "rank" in the organization at this time. The last to leave Nairobi, a full week after the bombing, Fazul had an intermediate position between the administrative leadership, which came to Nairobi in the week before the bombing to oversee the final preparations, and the foot-soldiers, who were all supposed to die in the attacks (Rashid al-Owhali survived and was later arrested). His letter of 1997 included the statement that "we do not want to know the operations plans since we are just implementers." After the summer of 1998, this began to change, and ultimately Fazul would take over the leadership of al-Qa'ida's operations in East Africa.

1999-2001: al-Qa'ida, Liberia and West African Blood Diamonds⁴¹

In the year following the embassy bombings Fazul became one of the key players in al-Qa'ida's entry into the blood diamond business. After the embassy bombings, the U.S. began to take steps to freeze al-Qa'ida's assets, and in response al-Qa'ida began to sink millions of dollars into West African blood diamonds, an ideal way to launder, protect and increase its financial resources. Fazul would spend the bulk of this period in West Africa as a protected guest of Charles Taylor and one of the two al-Qa'ida members who oversaw the organization's end of Taylor's diamond business.

³⁹ According to *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden et al.*, S(9) 98 Cr. 1023, Indictment, pp. 26ff., Fazul flew from Khartoum to Nairobi on March 4, April 28 and May 10 of 1998.

⁴⁰ A detailed timeline of the embassy bombings can be found in *Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack*, pp. 63ff.

⁴¹ A much more detailed account of al-Qa'ida's relationship to the West African diamond trade can be found in Douglas Farah's *Blood From Stones*.

The relationship began in 22 September 1998, less than two months after the embassy bombings, when Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah arrived in Monrovia, Liberia, to meet with Ibrahim Bah, a Senegalese soldier of fortune who was part of Taylor's inner circle and had the rank of general in the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which was controlled directly by Taylor.⁴² Bah introduced Abdullah to senior RUF commanders, including Sam Bockerie, and it was agreed that Abdullah would later send al-Qa'ida representatives with cash. In March of 1999, Fazul and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani⁴³ came to Liberia and spent several days touring the diamond fields in Sierra Leone controlled by the RUF. They met with Bockerie in Foya, Liberia and gave him \$50,000 in cash; they were given a package of diamonds in return, and then made calls by satellite phone to Belgium and Pakistan. They then met with Taylor at his Congo Town home and gave him half a million dollars in cash.

In December of 2000, the two met with the Lebanese diamond dealers Samih Ossaily and Allie Darwish in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and another large transaction was made. On January 22, 2001, the two Lebanese dealers signed a three year lease on a large house in Monrovia that would become the headquarters of Fazul and Ghailani on their frequent trips to Liberia in this period. They came on March 3 using Yemeni passports and stayed on through the mining season, to the end of summer; during this period al-Qa'ida cornered the market on Liberian and Sierra Leonean diamonds, which are among the highest quality diamonds in the world. In late June, along with a female al-Qa'ida operative using the pseudonym Feriel Shahin, Fazul and Abdullah flew to Karachi, stayed several nights at the Shaharah-e Faisal hotel, and then proceeded to Quetta.

In July 2001 Fazul and Abdullah returned to West Africa, staying initially at the presidential complex of Blaise Campaore in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. In that same month, Aziz Nassour, another Lebanese diamond dealer and cousin of Ossaily, flew from Beirut to Dubai to pick up \$1 million in cash; this was then delivered to Taylor as an up-front payment for offering the two al-Qa'ida operatives a safe haven. Once the cash was delivered, the two moved from Burkina Faso to a military camp near Taylor's private farm called Camp Gbatala, where Liberia's elite Anti-Terrorism Unit trained with South African mercenaries. They remained in hiding there until at least December of 2001. In late November, on the basis of European intelligence indicating that the two were in Camp Gbatala, the DIA stood up a snatch team of Special Forces, but, unable to confirm the identifications, the team was told to stand down a week later.

The relationship with Taylor and his RUF allies maintained by Fazul and Abdullah was hugely successful for al-Qa'ida. More than \$20 million was moved by al-Qa'ida in this way, and firm ties were made with important actors in the international

⁴² Farah, "Al Qaeda Cash Tied to Diamon Trade." Bah fought with Senegalese separatists in the 1970s, went on to train with Qaddafi in Libya, fought with the mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 1980s (where he made his initial contacts with future al-Qa'ida leadership), and later trained a number of people who became West African warlords, including Taylor and Foday Sankoh, founder of the RUF. As of the late 1990s, Bah was in charge of Taylor's diamond-related activities and was the conduit point between RUF commanders and al-Qa'ida and Hezbollah diamond buyers.

⁴³ Ghailani was arrested in Pakistan in 2004.

black market in blood diamonds and weapons. There is evidence that suggests the two bought weapons through Nassour and Ossaily, possibly even SA-8 surface-to-air missiles.⁴⁴ The large sum paid to Taylor to protect Fazul and Abdullah, probably in anticipation of a worldwide manhunt in the wake of 9/11, is an indication of Fazul's rise in the organization, or at the very least shows that he was recognized by this point as an extremely valuable asset.

2002-2007: Leading the East Africa cell

Fazul's next assignment was to assume a leading role in al-Qa'ida's East Africa operations. His base of operations for 2002 was the village of Siyu on the Lamu Archipelago on the northern coast of Kenya, where he lived under the pseudonym Abdulkarim.⁴⁵ In that remote village of around 2,000 people Fazul set up shop as a preacher and madrasa teacher, establishing his own madrasa for this purpose. He was joined there by a number of other operatives who would go on to participate in an attack in Mombasa towards the end of the year; some of them worked as fishermen, others worked with Fazul as preachers and missionaries. Their message as preachers was predictably Salafi in tone; the village chief later testified that "they were teaching against the celebration of Maulid (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) and the people were not pleased with it."⁴⁶ Fazul also married a local girl in Siyu, 16-year-old Amina Kubwa,⁴⁷ and recruited her father, brother and one of her cousins to help with the November bombings.⁴⁸ In July of 2002 Fazul was arrested by Kenyan police for credit card fraud, but he escaped after only one day in custody; the Kenyan authorities claim they didn't recognize him.⁴⁹

The beginnings of the bombing plot of 2002 began in November of 2001, when several members of the team gathered in Mogadishu and began training in rented apartments in small arms and explosives.⁵⁰ Throughout the year, Fazul would occasionally come in to Mogadishu to oversee the progress of the team there. By April 2002 the targets were identified and by August the group had smuggled a number of SA-7b Grail missiles and shoulder-launchers into Kenya from Somalia by sea; the weapons had been earlier bought in Yemen.⁵¹ On November 28, the team split into four groups; one group stayed in Mombasa, one went to Mombasa to suicide bomb the Paradise Hotel,⁵² one went to Lamu to prepare an escape boat, and the final group, led by Fazul, carried out the failed missile attack on an Israeli passenger plane as it left Moi

⁴⁴ Farah, "Report Says Africans Harbored Al Qaeda."

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Fazul's association with Lamu goes back much further; he listed it as his birthplace in a Kenyan identity card that he illegally obtained in 1996 (Vick, "FBI Trails Embassy Bombing Suspect").

⁴⁶ "Witness tells of terror suspect's marriage."

⁴⁷ Mutonya and Munene, "Woman helps identify bomb raid suspects." Muiruri, "Most wanted terrorist named," writes that she was 14 at the time of marriage.

⁴⁸ These were Kubwa Muhammad, Muhammad Kubwa and Abud Rogo Muhammad, respectively (Lacey, "Kenya to Charge 4").

⁴⁹ "Bush should heed Hempstone's advice."

⁵⁰ Peleman et al., *Report of the Panel of Experts*, p. 29.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² A three-man team drove an explosives-laden SUV onto the lobby steps of the hotel; the detonation killed 13 and injured 80 people.

International Airport in Mombasa. The following day Fazul returned with some of the team to Lamu and escaped by boat, most likely to Somalia.

The following two years had Fazul planning further bomb attacks in the area. In early 2003 he was sighted at a mosque in Mogadishu, and in May he was spotted in Mombasa. The CIA contracted with Muhammad Dheere, a warlord based north of Mogadishu, to try to capture Fazul after these sightings, but the operation instead netted a lesser al-Qa'ida operative, a Yemeni by the name of Sulayman Abdullah Salim Hemed.⁵³ He informed police that Fazul was planning an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, and it subsequently closed down for a week.⁵⁴ The following year communications from Saleh Nabhan, a senior member of al-Qa'ida's East Africa cell, were intercepted, leading ultimately to the uncovering and therefore thwarting of a plot to bomb the new U.S. Embassy in Nairobi sometime in 2004. The plan was to drive a bomb truck into the Embassy and at the same time to fly a chartered airplane into the building.

Following this unsuccessful plot, nothing is known about Fazul's operational activities, though he does appear to have had a high-level position within the Council of Islamic Courts in Somalia since at least 2005, possibly as head of intelligence.⁵⁵ He was spotted during March of that year taking a *kwassa kwassa* (a kind of boat) from Moroni to the island of Mayotte.⁵⁶ He continued to work with the CIC in Somalia through 2006, and at the end of December had his wife Halima and their three children join him in Mogadishu from Pakistan.⁵⁷

On January 8 and 9, 2007, at least one U.S. C-130 gunship attacked targets in Somalia in an attempt to kill Fazul and two other senior al-Qa'ida operatives.⁵⁸ It was initially reported that Fazul had died, but this was later retracted. On January 11, Kenyan police captured Fazul's wife and three children, along with other operatives and their family members attempting to flee Somalia. The group initially included Fazul; they stopped for the night in a forest in Kiunga on the Kenyan border, and Fazul and three other men set off alone. The rest of the party was arrested there in the morning. Fazul's wife was arrested with his laptop computer and more than \$5,000 in cash. According to Kenyan police, who managed to bypass the password protect on the laptop in late January, the computer contained "vital information on terrorism training and intelligence collection including spying."⁵⁹ Members of the elite U.S. anti-terrorism Task Force 88 are currently on the ground in East Africa searching for Fazul. According to a Madagascar newspaper, there had been claims of a sighting of Fazul at Majunga, a port

⁵³ Butler, "5-Year Hunt Fails to Net Qaeda Suspect." Hemed was captured in June of 2003.

⁵⁴ "Target of U.S. strike wanted for multiple attacks."

⁵⁵ "Computer May Hold Clue on Terror Suspect."

⁵⁶ Rodier, "Chasse aux djihadists"; D.H., "Un lieutenant de Ben Laden à l'île de Mayotte?"

⁵⁷ "Computer May Hold Clue on Terror Suspect."

⁵⁸ U.S. military assets were already active in the area in support of the Ethiopian army's invasion force that ousted the CIC from its areas of control beginning in December 2006 and continuing to the present date into early 2007.

⁵⁹ "Kenya: We have hacked al-Qaida laptop."

city on the northwest coast of Madagascar, in the weeks following the U.S. bombing operation in Somalia.⁶⁰

Though the chances of catching Fazul are as good now as they've ever been, it won't be easy. He has used dozens if not scores of pseudonyms,⁶¹ has extensive contacts with virtually every kind of criminal underground in the region, and, as the photographs at the head of this profile attest, he is skilled at disguising his appearance. In his al-Qa'ida career he has successfully passed as a Kenyan, a Somali, a Sudanese, a Moroccan, a Yemeni and a South Asian, and he has command of at least five languages. Highly intelligent and thoroughly trained, he is one the most dangerous international terrorists alive today.⁶²

⁶⁰ "Qaida-Terrorist versteckt sich in Madagaskar."

⁶¹ In addition to the many permutations of Abdullah Muhammad Fazul, his known pseudonyms include the following: Abu Aisha, Abu Luqman, Abu Sayf al-Sudani, Harun al-Qamar, Ahmad Hassan, Abdulkarim, `Ali Fadil Husayn and Fu'ad Muhammad.

⁶² Harmony documents pertaining to Fazul are: AFGP-2002-800080, AFGP-2002-800081, AFGP-2002-800083, AFGP-2002-800084, AFGP-2002-800086, AFGP-2002-800087, and AFGP-2002-800089.; also see Appendix C-III.

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