

Planned Extradition to Jordan of Abu Qatada Al-Filastini Met with Increasing Threats against Britain

Since the murderous terrorist attacks perpetrated by Mohammed Al-Merah in Toulouse, France some three weeks ago, a trend has been visible of increased threats against targets in Western Europe, made by members of both jihadist Internet forums and jihadist groups, including Al-Qaeda.

The Homegrown Threat in Europe

In general, jihadist Web forums have exploited the stifling tension and suspicion between Western regimes and Muslim immigrant communities, which have increased since the terrorist attacks in Toulouse. Their members appeal to Muslims living in Europe to imitate Mohammed Al-Merah and perpetrate similar terrorist attacks against targets there, presumably in aid of the mujahideen's struggle against the enemies of Islam, defense of Islam, and efforts to free Muslims imprisoned in the West. Cannily homing in on this tension, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) publicized a video clip on March 22, 2012, in which it specifically threatens to strike at the heart of Germany if the German government does not meet its demands to immediately release a Muslim woman known as Umm Sayfullah Al-Ansariyya. Umm Sayfullah, whose given name is Filiz Gelowicz, is a German citizen serving a prison sentence on conviction of having propagated jihadist propaganda and abetted terrorist organizations such as the Islamic Jihad Union and the German Taliban.¹ In exchange for her release, AQIM has promised to release a German citizen who disappeared in Nigeria in January 2012.² Similarly, a prominent contributor to jihadist Web forums calling himself Nasser Al-Qaeda threatened German Chancellor

¹ She was also accused of planning terrorist attacks against American targets in Germany, and was consequently sentenced to five years in prison – a sentence she began serving in 2010.

² 24.3.12 <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?p=306240> (Arabic).

Angela Merkel with an attack in central Berlin to rival those in Toulouse if she did not see to the release of Umm Sayfullah Al-Ansariyya.³

Threats to Britain

During the past two weeks, jihadist groups have increased their threats against Britain. In early April, Waliur Rehman, deputy head of the Pakistani Taliban, threatened to attack Britain if it did not release Islamist prisoners or improve their treatment.⁴ This threat appeared all the more salient after the decision of a British court, on April 10, 2012, to extradite Abu Qatada Al-Filastini, the spiritual leader of Al-Qaeda in Europe, to Jordan on the diplomatic assurance that he would not be tortured. The leadership of Al-Qaeda roundly criticized the decision and Britain in general, claiming that Abu Qatada had sustained the terrible injustice of curtailment of his right to freedom of speech and expression. Now, Al-Qaeda railed, Britain had added insult to injury by agreeing to extradite Abu Qatada to Jordan rather than releasing him after years of imprisonment. Al-Qaeda's leadership promised that Britain and its citizens would bear the brunt of these actions, now that the "door of evil" had been opened upon them.⁵

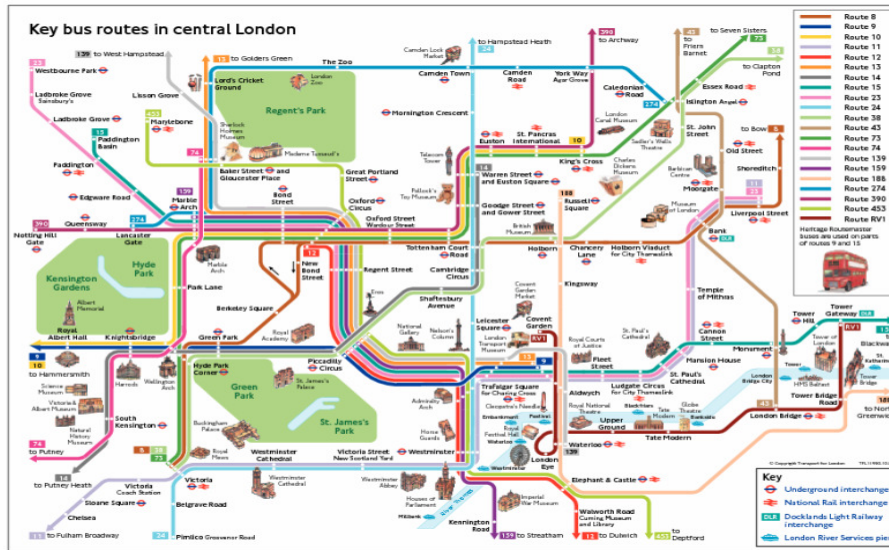
Al-Qaeda's threats prompted lively debate on jihadist Web forums. For example, the members of prominent jihadist Web forum Shumukh Al-Islam agreed among themselves that it was reasonable that Al-Qaeda would make good on its threats, and that a terrorist attack against British citizens, on British soil, could be expected in retaliation against the intended extradition to Jordan of Abu Qatada Al-Filastini. As one forum member stated: "Anyone who follows Al-Qaeda knows that Al-Qaeda does not make idle threats or issue empty warnings...such that attacks [against Britain by Al-Qaeda] are just a matter of time". He added that, to this end, Al-Qaeda would activate its sleeper cells scattered throughout Britain; most likely, the attacks would outflank even those of September 11. Another contributor to the forum thoughtfully

³ 10.14.12 <http://al-fidaa.com/vb/showthread.php?t=28071> (Arabic).

⁴ 2.4.12 <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=58523> (Arabic).

⁵ 10.4.12 <http://www.alfidaa.org/vb/showthread.php?t=27995> (Arabic).

uploaded a map of bus routes in central London, as an aid to anyone interested in participating in the onslaught against Britain.⁶

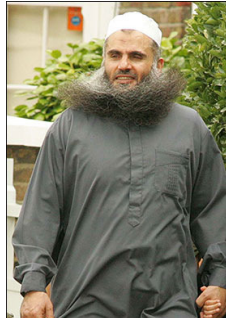


A map of London's key bus routes, uploaded by a Web surfer to jihadist Shumukh Al-Islam

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Abu Qatada Al-Filastini, considered "Osama bin Laden's right-hand man in Europe" and Al-Qaeda's spiritual leader on the continent, was born in Bethlehem in 1960, when that city was still under Jordanian control. In September 1993 he arrived in Britain under a forged passport from the United Arab Emirates. He and his family requested, and were granted, political asylum, on the pretext that he had been tortured by the Jordanian authorities. In 1999 he was convicted in Jordan *in absentia* of conspiracy to commit a terrorist attack in the Hashemite Kingdom, and was sentenced to life imprisonment. One year later he was again convicted, this time of the intending to murder tourists to Jordan, and was sentenced to a further 15 years in prison.

⁶ 11.4.12 <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=156354> (Arabic).



Abu Qatada Al-Filastini

According to the indictment, Abu Qatada played a key role in several terrorist organizations affiliated with Global Jihad: the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and the Tunisian Combat Group (TCG). In 1997 he issued an Islamic legal ruling that it was permissible, in the service of the fight against heresy, for Muslims to murder the wives and children of Egyptian police and military officers. The British press reported that Abu Qatada served as the spiritual advisor to Zakariyyah Musawi, who was involved in the September 11 attacks, and Richard Reid (aka the "shoe bomber"), who had tried to blow up an airplane using explosives smuggled in the soles of his shoes. During the inquiry into the September 11 attacks, 19 audio recordings of Abu Qatada's sermons were found in the apartment of Muhammad Atta, who had led the attacks.

In 2008 Abu Qatada was arrested, but was released on bail. Six months later he was again arrested after violating the conditions of his bail. A Special Immigration Appeals Commission determined that he was a significant enough security risk to remain in prison pending his deportation from Britain. In February 2009, an additional court ruled that he was to be deported to Jordan. Abu Qatada appealed to the European Court of Human Rights. The Court granted his appeal, ruling that his incarceration was illegal and infringed on his human rights; it even granted him £2,500 in compensation.

In January 2012, the Special Immigration Appeals Commission ruled that it was no longer legal to hold Abu Qatada without trial. It ordered his release under strict conditions: house arrest for 22 hours of every day; no access to a computer, telephone, or any electronic means of communication; and a limited number of visitors. The court further ordered the British government to conclude the case, in coordination with Jordan, within three months – or else release Abu Qatada. On January 17, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that extraditing Abu Qatada to Jordan would contravene the European Convention on Human Rights, as it was very likely that testimony elicited under torture would be used against him, thereby violating his right to a fair trial. In the end, the judges in Strasbourg ruled that Britain could send Abu Qatada back to Jordan on condition that the government in Amman provides diplomatic guarantees that he would not be tortured.