

The Complete File on Abssi: Lebanon's Army Finishes Off Fatah al-Islam, Kills Abssi

Contributed by Naharnet, Dailystar, NYTimes, CRNnews, France24
Monday, 03 September 2007
Last Updated Monday, 03 September 2007

The Lebanese Army has finished off the Fatah al-Islam legend, killed its leader Shaker al-Abssi and 31 other terrorists and rounded up 20 in the 106th day of the confrontation at the northern refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared.

Security agencies have launched a nationwide manhunt for 10 terrorists who escaped the battle Sunday by infiltrating through the al-Bared River stream.

Judicial sources told Naharnet a Palestinian cleric, who had mediated with Fatah al-Islam terrorists, identified al-Abssi's body.

However, the judiciary issued a warrant to bring in al-Abssi's wife and daughter to the public hospital in Tripoli to identify the body and, to conduct DNA tests that would provide the definite answer to questions related to identity of the alleged Abssi corpse, the sources explained.

Al-Abssi's wife and daughter have been living in the southern refugee camp of Ain al-hilweh, near the city of Sidon, since Families of Fatah al-Islam terrorists were evacuated from Nahr al-Bared in Mid August.

Shortly after the victory was announced Sunday evening, Jubilant citizens took to the streets to salute their troops for what Premier Fouad Saniora termed "an hour of pride, victory and jubilation."

Saniora, in a televised message to the Lebanese screened late Sunday, praised the army's "sacrifices" and stressed that "we are determined to enable the state and its legal forces to be the protector … of the people's security."

Saniora said the army's victory against terrorists was equal to the "heroic acts" registered by "resistance fighters" against Israel in south Lebanon.

He was referring to the 34-day war between Hizbullah and Israel in the summer of 2006

Saniora said his majority government is determined to spread its authority and that of its "regular forces throughout Lebanese territory."

Troops throughout the day Sunday combed fields around the camp and raided nearby homes while search operations focused on nearby villages where some militants were killed or captured.

The army said Nahr al-Bared remains off limits to civilians pending further notice.

The army issued a statement appealing to residents of nearby villages to help in the search for militants who may be on the run.

In their pre-dawn breakout attempt the militants also had help from outside, a security source said.

"A Mercedes car pulled up at an army checkpoint on the eastern edge of the camp and began firing at soldiers as fighters launched an attack from inside," said the source.

Militants attacked another checkpoint at the same time.

The source said three people in the Mercedes were killed. The white vehicle, windows shattered and tires flat, was seen being towed away in mid-morning.

Fatah al-Islam terrorists broke out of their besieged enclave in three separate groups, two of the groups were finished off and the fighters were either killed or rounded up.

The third group, comprising 10 fighters, managed to infiltrate across their river stream and a manhunt has been launched for them, security sources said.(Naharnet)

from Naharnet, Beirut, 02 Sep 07, 08:08

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&0BD80BDF204AE39AC225734A001C2892>

Abssi's Wife Identifies Her Husband's Corpse

The wife of Fatah al-Islam's terrorist mastermind Shaker Abssi identified his corpse at the public hospital in the northern town of Tripoli Monday.

Hospital manager Nasser Adra told reporters Abssi's wife and a "young girl believed to be his daughter were brought into the hospital morgue early Monday amidst stringent security measures."

The wife identified the corpse as that of her husband Shaker Abssi," Adra added. He did not disclose further details.

However, a source at the hospital told Naharnet a veiled Mrs. Abssi and her daughter were brought in from their residence at the southern Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp to the public hospital in Tripoli's Qubbeh district early in the day.

"The woman gave to investigators specific description of distinguished marks in Abssi's arm and face and when shown the body, she pointed to these specific marks and confirmed that the corpse is that of her husband Shaker Abssi," the source explained.

He said Abssi's widow "signed the identification report and was whisked out by security agents."

However, DNA tests are underway and results will be announced in no more than 48 hours, the source added stressing that "this is a judicial procedure."

Abssi was killed along with 31 fellow terrorists in a major showdown with the Lebanese Army that ended the Nahr al-Bared battle which broke out on May 20.

Security sources said 20 Fatah al-Islam terrorists also were rounded up in the last battle and 10 managed to infiltrate out of Nahr al-Bared.

Security agencies have launched a manhunt for the 10.

from Naharnet, Beirut, 03 Sep 07, 10:38

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&3D4EE62D36EB5FDCC225734B0029D8CC>

Abssi: A Born Refugee-turned-Terrorist

Fatah al-Islam's terrorist mastermind Shaker Abssi who was killed in a major showdown with the Lebanese Army on Sunday, is a Palestinian refugee with a battle-hardened and globe-trotting history.

In the 1970's Abssi was member of the Fatah guerrilla group, the main faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Fatah sent him to Libya in 1976 to become a military pilot. He flew Russian-made MiG jettfighter for Libya in its war with Chad, and fought Israeli forces which invaded Lebanon to drive out the PLO in 1982, his brother Abed told Agence France Presse.

But later Abssi turned to radical Islam out of both religious conviction and "frustration" over the failure of the Palestinian cause, Abed told AFP recently in the Jordan capital of Amman where he lives and works as an Orthopaedic surgeon.

"My brother is one of them (Islamist radicals). They think maybe Islam is the way to liberation. Everything else failed," he said before his brother was killed on Sunday.

Abssi also is wanted by both Syria and Jordan for radical activities, including a plot that killed a U.S. diplomat in Amman.

Born in the Ain Sultan refugee camp near the West Bank town of Jericho in 1955, Abssi fled with his family to Jordan after Israel occupied the West Bank in the 1967 war.

Abed described his brother as a "brilliant" student in high school who left for Tunis to study medicine, but his main ambition was to work directly for "the liberation of Palestine."

Abssi joined Fatah, the main PLO faction, which sent him to Libya to become a pilot of Russian-built MiG fighters at the air force academy there, he added.

"He was very successful. He piloted the MiG 23. When Libya went to war with Chad, he defended Libyan territory with his plane," Abed al-Abssi added.

While a medical student in Cuba in 1981, Abed al-Abssi received a visit from Shaker who was en route to Nicaragua "where he was to help train a Sandinista air force. He stayed there for four or five months, I believe."

Then during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, he fought in the Bekaa Valley as the PLO did not have any planes, before returning to serve in the Libyan air force.

In 2002, the Syrian authorities threw him in prison for belonging to a banned Islamist group and for plotting attacks.

During his three years in jail, a Jordanian court sentenced him to death in absentia for having taken part in organizing the 2002 assassination in Amman of U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley.

Released in 2005, he left for Lebanon, where he was an activist leader for the Fatah-Intifada group, which was close to Syria, in the Palestinian refugee camp of Shatila in Beirut.

But months later he chose the path of radical Islam and led 100 armed men to set up base in the Nahr al-Bared camp.

There he founded Fatah al-Islam.

In an interview with the New York Times in March, Abssi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden, the fugitive leader of the Al-Qaida network, and said killing American and Israeli civilians is justified.

"We have every legitimate right to do such acts, for isn't it America that comes to our region and kills innocents and children? It is our right to hit them in their homes the same as they hit us in our homes," he told the daily.(Naharnet-AFP)

from Naharnet, Beirut, 03 Sep 07, 10:14

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&3D4EE62D36EB5FDCC225734B0029D8CC>

Earlier breaking reports on the Death of Shaker al-Abssi

Fatah al-Islam chief among siege dead
Article from: Agence France-Presse

From correspondents in Nahr Al-Bared
September 03, 2007 05:21am

THE head of Fatah al-Islam, Shaker al-Abssi, was killed overnight in fighting with the Lebanese army at a refugee camp and his body has been identified, an army source said.

"The body of Shaker al-Abssi is among the corpses of Islamists taken to the state-run hospital in Tripoli," said the source, who did not wish to be identified.

<http://www.news.com.au/mercury/story/0,22884,22352333-5007063,00.html>

Fatah al-Islam leader, Shaker al-Abssi, was killed in battles on Sunday with Lebanese troops and his body has been identified, the army announced.

Fatah al-Islam chief among Lebanon siege dead: army
2 September 2007 | 22:35 | FOCUS News Agency

Beirut. The head of Fatah al-Islam, Shaker al-Abssi, was killed on Sunday in fighting with the Lebanese army at a refugee camp and his body has been identified, an army source told AFP.

"The body of Shaker al-Abssi is among the corpses of Islamists taken to the state-run hospital in Tripoli," said the source, who did not wish to be identified.

<http://www.focus-fen.net/?id=n121077>

LBC News (1) 2007 09 02
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LBC News (2) 2007 09 02
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Celebrations in Nahr el Bared 2007 09 02
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Fighting in Lebanon, Nahr el-Bared, Part 1
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Fighting in Lebanon, Nahr el-Bared, Part 6
{youtube}YxAKV7MQzSs{/youtube}

Earlier today

Lebanon army takes control of camp after battle
By AFP

NAHR AL-BARED, Lebanon, Sept 2 (Reuters) - Lebanese troops on Sunday seized control of a Palestinian refugee camp where they had been battling militants for more than three months, killing at least 31 fleeing fighters, security sources said.

Thirty-four more Islamist militants from the Fatah al-Islam group were captured, 23 inside the Nahr al-Bared camp in northern Lebanon. Most were wounded, a security source said.

"The battle is over. The Lebanese army has seized the last positions of Fatah al-Islam in the camp," a senior security source told Reuters.

"Most of the terrorists were killed today. The others have been captured. A few might have escaped but the army is hunting them down," the source added.

The fate of Shaker al-Abssi, the group's Palestinian leader, was unclear. Fatah al-Islam says it shares al Qaeda's ideology but has no organisational ties to the network.

The fighting has been Lebanon's worst internal violence since the 1975-1990 civil war, killing more than 300 people.

Five soldiers were killed on Sunday, raising the army death toll to 157. At least 131 militants and 42 civilians have also been killed.

The army had initially estimated that only 35 active fighters remained in the camp before Sunday, along with the wounded. An army statement said the militants had tried to escape from the camp in the early hours of the morning.

"desperate attempts"

The fighters "attacked army positions in a desperate attempt to flee", the statement said.

At least three gunmen from outside the camp had also attacked an army position to help the fighters escape, security sources said.

Security forces patrolled the area, searching orchards and fields. Helicopters joined in the hunt and naval boats patrolled the Mediterranean coast. Security sources believe Fatah al-Islam set booby-traps around the camp.

Soldiers fired celebratory gunfire and locals threw rice at the troops to applaud their efforts. Soldiers sitting atop army vehicles waved Lebanese flags.

Most of the camp's 40,000 residents fled to a nearby Palestinian refugee camp in the early days of fighting, which erupted on May 20 when the army says Fatah al-Islam attacked its positions near the camp and the northern city of Tripoli.

Fatah al-Islam split from a Syrian-backed Palestinian faction last year. The hardline Sunni Islamist group includes Lebanese, Saudi and Syrian fighters.

The militants had put up fierce resistance, managing to inflict casualties on the army despite aerial and artillery bombardment. Their wives and children were evacuated from the camp on Aug. 24.

The army said it would not allow anyone to enter the camp and called on Palestinians not to return for the time being.

"We have to work on de-mining and rubble removal," said Hoda Elturk, a spokeswoman for the U.N. agency which cares for the Palestinian refugee community. "We are waiting for the green light from the army to enter the camp."

Camp leader believed "killed"

The leader of Fatah al-Islam militants Shaker al-Abssi was believed killed in fighting with Lebanese troops on Sunday, security sources said.

A Fatah al-Islam prisoner identified a body of a militant killed near Nahr al-Bared camp as that of Abssi's but the Lebanese army were running DNA tests to confirm that it was him, the sources said.

<http://www.france24.com/france24Public/en/news/world/20070902-lebanon-nahr-al-bared-islamists-dead-escape.html>

Lebanese Army prevails at Nahr al-Bared
Fatah al-islam militants slaughtered in last-ditch bid to break out of camp
By Michael Bluhm
Daily Star staff
Monday, September 03, 2007

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Army crushed a series of pre-dawn escape attempts by Fatah al-Islam militants on Sunday and won control of the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in North Lebanon after more than 100 days of battle. Soldiers briefly danced in the streets near the camp with celebrating locals to mark the end of a conflict that left some 158 soldiers dead, as well as some 20 civilians and dozens of militants, according to official army counts.

The army killed 39 militants and captured 20 others on Sunday when the remaining Fatah al-Islam gunmen tried in at least three places to break out of the largely destroyed camp at about 3-4 a.m., said an AP report.

A high-ranking senior army officer told retired army General Elias Hanna that the military believed Fatah al-Islam leader Shaker al-Abssi had fled three to four hours before the other militants' bids to escape, Hanna said.

As The Daily Star went to press, however, reports emerged that Abssi's body had been found at Nahr al-Bared. These could not be confirmed.

The attempted breakout began as a clutch of gunmen sprang from an underground tunnel in an army-controlled part of the camp, a television report said.

At the same time, another band of militants reportedly attacked a different army position while accomplices from outside the camp arrived in a white Mercedes to pin army troops down from the other side. Soldiers killed three men from the car, a report by Agence France Presse said.

The army initially believed Abssi was in a third crew that snuck out along a river running between the southeastern part of the camp and the village of Ayun al-Samak in a remote mountainous region, the AFP report said. The army killed a number of members of that group, but several escaped.

Army troops fanned out around the camp and blocked roads to stop militants from fleeing, as helicopters helped in the search for fleeing gunmen, said an AP report.

The two other attempts at breaking out of the camp might have only been a "decoy" to give Abssi cover to get as far away from the camp as possible, perhaps out of the country, Hanna said.

"It was like a desperation move for Fatah al-Islam or maybe for the army not to kill or capture Shaker al-Abssi," he told The Daily Star. "I expected a breakthrough, but it seems that these guys really want to die. They had prepared for all of this when they evacuated the wives and the children."

The planning and use of outside personnel in Sunday morning's operation signals that Fatah al-Islam can still function despite the end of the Nahr al-Bared battle, Hanna warned.

"This kind of operation needs broader capabilities," he said. "It was well-prepared from inside and outside. They have to have communication and they have to have a certain knowledge or tactical information about what is going on outside Nahr al-Bared. There must be some people who planned for his escape from the camp."

"Was it only Shaker al-Abssi? I doubt it. This is not Abssi only. He is not Napoleon."

"From the outside they still have some committed people. There must be some more Lebanese or some more regional players involved."

The militants could never have won at Nahr al-Bared once the army surrounded the camp after hostilities erupted on May 20, but the army performed well in the conflict against the well-armed and well-trained Fatah al-Islam militants despite the army's lack of advanced weaponry and experience in urban warfare, he said.

"From the first day when the camp was encircled, militarily speaking it is doomed," Hanna said. "I don't think that three months for our army is too long if you take the situation of the camp - a very condensed area."

Army Commander General Michel Suleiman had told the Cabinet that the siege could last from three to six months, Hanna added.

The army's victory might deter any other militant groups with similar plans in Lebanon, Hanna said.

"The stakes were very high," he added. "This fight may help the army to really understand what could face the army in the future in Ain al-Hilweh or Rashidiyeh," he added.

Even though the army has taken control of the Nahr al-Bared camp, the military still has work to do. "From the military point of view, we're not done yet," Hanna said. "The army still has to clear the camp, see what is inside, debrief the people and reconstruct the whole structure of Fatah al-Islam" to determine if it resembled Al-Qaeda or was linked to a foreign intelligence apparatus.

The gun battles ceased before noon on Sunday, while the army later cordoned off the area around the camp, closed the nearby road connecting Tripoli to Syria, set up checkpoints throughout the country and continued searching for escaped militants. The army burned a field near Nahr al-Bared to flush out militants.

Many inhabitants of North Lebanon armed themselves with guns and sticks to defend their communities and deny refuge to escaped militants, one report said. Others gathered near the camp to cheer the soldiers, and nearby villagers fired weapons to celebrate the conquest.

The army also asked the displaced residents of the Nahr al-Bared camp, who number more than 31,000, not to return there until the military opened the camp. - With agencies

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=85003

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/printable.asp?art_ID=85003&cat_ID=2

Fatah al-Islam chief Shaker al-Abssi killed
By Agence France Presse (AFP)

Monday, September 03, 2007

NAHR AL-BARED, Lebanon, Sept 2, 2007 (AFP) - The head of Fatah al-Islam, Shaker al-Abssi, was killed on Sunday in fighting with the Lebanese army at a refugee camp and his body has been identified, an army officer told AFP.

"The body of Shaker al-Abssi is among the corpses of Islamists taken to the state-run hospital in Tripoli," said the officer, who did not wish to be identified.

Several medical examiners were dispatched to the hospital to view the bodies of Islamists taken there, he added.

Lebanese minister Ahmad Fatfat told Al-Jazeera television, monitored in Dubai, that it appeared that Absi had been killed in the siege.

"Information that reached me about one and a half hours ago (around 1830 GMT) confirms up to 90 percent that several witnesses identified the body of Mr Shaker al-Absi at the government hospital in Tripoli," said Fatfat.

"But further confirmations are required, additional witnesses have been called, and DNA tests are being carried out in order to have a definite confirmation before an official statement is issued," he said.

Fatfat is minister for youth and sports and close to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

Asked how long these procedures would take, he said: "If witnesses are unanimous, I think DNA (tests) would become secondary, especially since Absi's wife is on hand. But if a DNA test is needed, that takes around two days." -AFP

Abssi: fighter pilot turned Islamist radical

Shaker al-Absi, the Al-Qaeda-inspired leader whose fate is unknown after a bloody siege in Lebanon, is a Palestinian refugee with a battle-hardened and globetrotting past.

In the 1980s, Absi served in the secular Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), flew MiG fighter jets for Libya in its war with Chad, and fought Israeli forces which invaded Lebanon to drive out the PLO, his brother Abed said.

But later Absi turned to radical Islam out of both religious conviction and "frustration" over the failure of the Palestinian cause, Abed told AFP recently in the Jordan capital where he lives and works as an orthopaedic surgeon.

"My brother is one of them (Islamist radicals). They think maybe Islam is the way to liberation. Everything else failed," he said as he worried about his brother.

His fate remained unknown as one Lebanese army office said Absi, the leader of Fatah al-Islam, appeared to have fled the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in north Lebanon the troops announced they had retaken control on Sunday.

But an army source told AFP later that his body had been identified among the dead Islamists taken to the state-run hospital in Tripoli.

In addition to being sought by Lebanese troops, he is wanted by both Syria and Jordan for radical activities, including a plot that killed a US diplomat in Amman.

Born in the Ain Sultan refugee camp near the West Bank town of Jericho in 1955, Absi fled with his family to Jordan after Israel occupied the West Bank in the 1967 war.

Abed described his brother as a "brilliant" student in high school who left for Tunis to study medicine, but his main ambition was to work directly for "the liberation of Palestine." Absi joined Fatah, the main PLO faction, which sent him to Libya to become a pilot of Russian-built MiG fighters at the air force academy there, he added.

"He was very successful. He piloted the MiG 23. When Libya went to war with Chad, he defended Libyan territory with his plane," Abed al-Absi added.

While a medical student in Cuba in 1981, Abed al-Absi received a visit from Shaker who was en route to Nicaragua "where he was to help train a Sandinista air force. He stayed there four or five months, I believe." Then during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, he fought in the Bekaa Valley as the PLO did not have any planes, before returning to serve in the Libyan air force.

In 2002, the Syrian authorities threw him in prison for belonging to a banned Islamist group and for plotting attacks.

During his three years in jail, a Jordanian court sentenced him to death in his absence for having taken part in organising the 2002 assassination in Amman of US diplomat Laurence Foley.

Released in 2005, he left for Lebanon, where he was an activist leader for the Fatah-Intifada group, which was close to Syria, in the Palestinian refugee camp of Shatila in Beirut.

But months later he chose the path of radical Islam and led 100 armed men to set up beside the Nahr al-Bared camp.

There he founded Fatah al-Islam.

In an interview with the New York Times in March, Abssi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden, the fugitive leader of the Al-Qaeda network, and said that killing American and Israeli civilians is justified.

"We have every legitimate right to do such acts, for isn't it America that comes to our region and kills innocents and children? It is our right to hit them in their homes the same as they hit us in our homes," he told the daily.- AFP

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http://www.dailystar.com.lb/printable.asp?art_ID=85007&cat_ID=2

The infamous NYTimes Article in which Shaker al Abssi threatens Americans Lives!

March 16, 2007

New Face of Jihad Vows Attacks

By SQUAD MEKHENNET and MICHAEL MOSS

TRIPOLI, Lebanon — Deep in a violent and lawless slum just north of this coastal city, 12 men whose faces were shrouded by scarves drilled with Kalashnikovs.

In unison, they lunged in one direction, turned and lunged in another. "Allah-u akbar," the men shouted in praise to God as they fired their machine guns into a wall.

The men belong to a new militant Islamic organization called Fatah al Islam, whose leader, a fugitive Palestinian named Shakir al-Abssi, has set up operations in a refugee camp here where he trains fighters and spreads the ideology of Al Qaeda.

He has solid terrorist credentials. A former associate of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda of Mesopotamia who was killed last summer, Mr. Abssi was sentenced to death in absentia along with Mr. Zarqawi in the 2002 assassination of an American diplomat in Jordan, Laurence Foley. Just four months after arriving here from Syria, Mr. Abssi has a militia that intelligence officials estimate at 150 men and an arsenal of explosives, rockets and even an anti-aircraft gun.

During a recent interview with The New York Times, Mr. Abssi displayed his makeshift training facility and his strident message that America needed to be punished for its presence in the Islamic world. "The only way to achieve our rights is by force," he said. "This is the way America deals with us. So when the Americans feel that their lives and their economy are threatened, they will know that they should leave."

Mr. Abssi's organization is the image of what intelligence officials have warned is the re-emergence of Al Qaeda. Shattered after 2001, the organization founded by Osama bin Laden is now reforming as an alliance of small groups around the world that share a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam but have developed their own independent terror capabilities, these officials have said. If Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, who has acknowledged directing the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and a string of other terror plots, represents the previous generation of Qaeda leaders, Mr. Abssi and others like him represent the new.

American and Middle Eastern intelligence officials say he is viewed as a dangerous militant who can assemble small teams of operatives with acute military skill.

"Guys like Abssi have the capability on the ground that Al Qaeda has lost and is looking to tap into," said an American intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity. Mr. Abssi has shown himself to be a canny operator. Despite being on terrorism watch lists around the world, he has set himself up in a Palestinian refugee camp where, because of Lebanese politics, he is largely shielded from the government. The camp also gives him ready access to a pool of recruits, young Palestinians whose militant vision has evolved from the struggle against Israel to a larger Islamic cause.

Intelligence officials here say that he has also exploited another source of manpower: they estimate he has 50 militants from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries fresh from fighting with the insurgency in Iraq.

The officials say they fear that he is seeking to establish himself as a terror leader on the order of Mr. Zarqawi. "He is trying to fill a void and do so in a high-profile manner that will attract the attention of supporters," the American intelligence official said.

Mr. Abssi has recently taken on a communications adviser, Abu al-Hassan, 24, a journalism student who dropped out of college to join Fatah al Islam. His current project: a newsmagazine aimed at attracting recruits.

The arc of Mr. Abssi's life shows the allure of Al Qaeda for Arab militants. Born in Palestine, from which he and family were evicted by the Israelis, Mr. Abssi, 51, said he stopped studying medicine to fly planes for Yasir Arafat. He then staged attacks on Israel from his own base in Syria. After he was imprisoned in Syria for three years on terrorism charges, he said he broadened his targets to include Americans in Jordan.

The Times arranged to speak with Mr. Abssi through a series of intermediaries, who helped set up meetings in his headquarters at the Nahr al Bared refugee camp. Mr. Abssi, a soft-spoken man with salt-and-pepper hair, was interviewed in a bare room inside a small cinderblock building on the edge of a field where training was under way. About 80 men were in the compound, performing various tasks, including one who manned an anti-aircraft gun. As Mr. Abssi spoke, two aides took notes, while a third fiddled with a submachine gun. A bazooka leaned against the wall behind him.

In a 90-minute interview, his first with Western reporters, Mr. Abssi said he shared Al Qaeda's fundamentalist interpretation and endorsed the creation of a global Islamic nation. He said killing American soldiers in Iraq was no longer enough to convince the American public that its government should abandon what many Muslims view as a war against Islam.

"We have every legitimate right to do such acts, for isn't it America that comes to our region and kills innocents and children?" Mr. Abssi said. "It is our right to hit them in their homes the same as they hit us in our homes."

"We are not afraid of being named terrorists," he added. "But I want to ask, is someone who detonates one kilogram a terrorist while someone who detonates tons in Arab and Islamic cities not a terrorist?"

When asked, Mr. Abssi refused to say what his targets might be.

[This week, Lebanese law enforcement officials said they arrested four men from Fatah al Islam in Beirut and other Lebanese cities and were charging them with the February bombing of two commuter buses carrying Lebanese Christians. Mr. Abssi denies any involvement and says he has no plans to strike within Lebanon.]

Fertile Soil for Militants

Inside the Palestinian camp, Mr. Abssi seems to be building his operation with little interference.

Maj. Gen. Achraf Rifi, general director of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces, says the government does not have authority to enter a Palestinian camp — even though Mr. Abssi is now wanted in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria on terrorism charges.

To enter the camps, he said, "We would need an agreement from other Arab countries." He said that instead the government was tightening its cordon around the camp to make it harder for Mr. Abssi or his men to slip in and out.

Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon have long been fertile ground for militancy, particularly focused on the fight against Israel. But militants in those camps now have a broader vision. In Ain el Hilwe camp, an hour's drive south of Beirut, another radical Sunni group, Asbat al Ansar, has been sending fighters to Iraq since the start of the war, its leaders acknowledged in interviews.

"The U.S. is oppressing a lot of people," the group's deputy commander, who goes by the name of Abu Sharif, said in a room strewn with Kalashnikovs. "They are killing a lot of innocents, but one day they are getting paid back." A leading sheik in the camp, Jamal Hatad, has a television studio that broadcasts 12 hours a day with shows ranging from viewer call-ins to video of Mr. bin Laden's statements and parents proudly displaying photographs of their martyred children.

"I was happy," Hamad Mustaf Ayasin, 70, recalled in hearing last fall that his 35-year-old son, Ahmed, had died in Iraq fighting American troops near the Syrian border. "The U.S. is against Muslims all over the world."

On the streets of the camp, one young man after another said dying in Iraq was no longer their only dream.

"If I had the chance to do any kind of operation against anyone who is against Islam, inside or outside of the United States, I would do the operation," said Mohamed, an 18-year-old student, who declined to give his last name.

Hussein Hamdan, 19, who keeps a poster of Osama bin Laden in the bedroom he shares with two sisters, is a street tough attuned to religious fundamentalism. He dropped out of school at age 10, spent 18 months in jail on assault charges, and in March — “just to make a statement,” he said — took a razor and repeatedly slashed both his forearms. “I want to become a mujahedeen and go to jihad in any country where there are Jews or Americans to fight against them,” he said.

Lebanon has increasingly become a source of terror suspects. One of the Sept. 11 hijackers came from Lebanon, as did six men charged with planting bombs on German trains last summer. Two other Lebanese men and a Palestinian were among those accused last spring of plotting to blow up the PATH train tunnels beneath the Hudson River.

The Killing of Innocents

Mr. Abssi said he derived much of his spiritual guidance from Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Bukhari, a ninth-century Islamic scholar. A recent study by the Defense Department’s Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, N.Y., listed Mr. Bukhari among the 20 Islamic scholars who had greater influence today among militant Arabs than Mr. bin Laden.

“Originally, the killing of innocents and children was forbidden,” Mr. Abssi said. “However, there are situations in which the killing of such is permissible. One of these exceptions is those that kill our women and children.”

“Osama bin Laden does make the fatwas,” Mr. Abssi said, using the Arabic word for Islamic legal pronouncements. “Should his fatwas follow the Sunnah,” or Islamic law, he said, “we will carry them out.”

His closest known association with Mr. Zarqawi involved the killing of Mr. Foley. In previously undisclosed court records obtained by The Times, Jordanian officials say that Mr. Abssi helped organize the assassination, working closely with Mr. Zarqawi.

A senior administrator for the United States Agency for International Development, Mr. Foley was leaving his home in Amman on Oct. 28, 2002, when he was shot at close range by a man who had hidden in his garage. Seven bullets from a 7-millimeter pistol struck his neck, face, chest and stomach, the Jordanian government said in court papers.

Eleven men were charged in the case, and two men have been hanged, including the gunman, Salem Sa’ad Salem bin Saweed. According to the court records, Mr. Saweed met Mr. Abssi five years earlier in Syria, where they became friends and “arranged military operations against American and Jewish interests in Jordan,” Mr. Zarqawi provided the \$10,000, along with \$32,000 more for additional attacks, the court papers say. But in meeting Mr. Saweed, Mr. Zarqawi told him to work through Mr. Abssi, who helped the gunman with money, logistics and training in weapons and explosives.

Mr. Saweed and an accomplice in Jordan chose Mr. Foley as a target by watching his neighborhood for cars bearing diplomatic plates.

A Valid Target

In the interview with The Times, Mr. Abssi acknowledged working with Mr. Zarqawi. He said he played no part in Mr. Foley’s death, but considered him a valid target. “I don’t know what Foley’s role was but I can say that any person that comes to our region with a military, security or political aim, then he is a legitimate target,” he said.

[Mr. Foley’s widow, Virginia Foley, said Wednesday that she thought her husband’s killers had either been killed or jailed. “I’m appalled and surprised that there is still somebody out there,” she said, when told of Mr. Abssi’s current activities.]

The American intelligence official said the prosecution of Mr. Foley’s killers was under the control of the Jordanians.

At the time of Mr. Foley’s death, Mr. Abssi had been in jail for two months, having been arrested on charges of plotting attacks inside Syria. He ultimately served three years in prison, says Mounir Ali, a spokesman for the Ministry of Information.

Mr. Ali denied recent reports in Lebanon that Syria sent Mr. Abssi to that country to stir trouble there. “This accusation is baseless,” Mr. Ali said. “After he was set free he restarted his terrorist activities by training elements in favor of Al Qaeda.”

He said Syria sought his arrest in late January, but discovered Mr. Abssi had “disappeared, and no one knew where he went.”

Late last November, Mr. Abssi moved into the Palestinian camp here, seized three compounds held by a secular group, Fatah al Intifada, raised his group’s black flag, and issued a declaration saying he was bringing religion to the Palestinian cause. Mr. Abssi reappeared on Jordan’s radar in January when police had a three-hour battle with two suspected terrorists in the northern Jordanian city of Irbid, killing one of the men. Authorities say they learned that Mr. Abssi had sent the men. A short while later, Lebanese authorities picked up two Saudi Arabian men leaving Mr. Abssi’s camp, and learned both men had fought in Iraq. Two more men were found leaving the camp in February, General Rifi said.

General Rifi said officials were trying to learn as much as possible about Mr. Abssi’s operation from sources and surveillance, but it was clear that their information was limited. In questioning people, security officials are showing a photograph of Mr. Abssi that is 30 years old, though it displays his most distinctive feature — two moles, one on each side of his nose.

The apparent inability to apprehend Mr. Abssi provokes fury in the men who are hunting him. A security official in one of the countries where he is wanted scowled when asked why Mr. Abssi was operating freely: “I can go lots of places to grab people, but I can’t grab him.”

In the interview with The Times, Mr. Abssi said he had been largely warmly received in the Palestinian camp, and that he was optimistic about his cause. “One of the reasons for choosing this camp is our belief that the people here are close to God as they feel the same suffering as our brothers in Palestine,” he said.

“Today’s youth, when they see what is happening in Palestine and Iraq, it entuses them to join the way of the right and jihad,” he said. “These people have now started to adopt the right path.”

Mark Mazzetti contributed reporting from Washington, and Margot Williams from New York.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/16/world/middleeast/16jihad.html?ei=5070&en=1067e6ea7e4df6ea&ex=1188878400&pagewanted=print>
