

Al-Qaeda Member's Account of His Stay in Iran

Contributed by MEMRI
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Columnist Fares bin Hazam, who specializes in issues relating to Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, published in the Saudi daily Al-Riyadh a personal account by a former Al-Qaeda member of Saudi origin. The article, titled "Iran Recruits Members to Al-Qaeda at Tens of Thousands Dollars a Month," describes the assistance the former fighter and his friends received from Iranian authorities after they fled Afghanistan, as well as Iranian attempts to recruit him as an Iranian agent in Saudi Arabia.

The following are excerpts from the account:

"After the disintegration of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 as a result of the American attack and the coming to power of other Afghan forces in the country, instructions were received from our leadership to retreat from Kabul in the direction of Kandahar. In the month of Ramadan, we received instructions from our commander to leave for Iran in order to seek refuge there. We arrived in Iran via Pakistan, where we did not stay very long. Our group consisted of about 30 fighters, among them Faisal Al-Dakhil, 'Amr Al-Shehri [both killed in 2004] and other prominent figures wanted by the Saudi government.

"We were aware that Afghani [Islamist] leader Gulboddin Hekmatyar, who resided in Iran [at that time], was acting as an intermediary and liaison [between us and] Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Hekmatyar promised us accommodation in the border city of Zehdan [in southeastern Iran], where the majority of the residents are Baluchi Sunnis. There we met with Al-Qaeda commander Abu Hafs Al-Mauritani, who had earlier opposed the September 11 attacks. [Al-Mauritani] assured us that we were in a safe place, and that we would be questioned by Iranian intelligence services in Teheran, who would provide for all our needs during our stay in Iran.

"Our numbers dwindled: only 10 of us remained after about two-thirds of our group had disappeared, Al-Dakhil and Al-Shehri among them. We moved to Teheran and met with the interrogators. They proposed that I collaborate with them from abroad, [that is,] from my country [Saudi Arabia], supplying them with information that they would need in the future. Their offer shocked me. I declined, and then was overcome with fear that the refusal would [harm the chances of] my release and return to my country. The interrogator began enticing me: '[You will receive] a monthly salary of \$10,000, an Iranian passport, and military training with Hizbullah in Lebanon.'

"However, I was firm in my refusal to cooperate in any way. All I wanted was to leave. The [Iranian] officer said: 'You and us, we are both fighting the same enemy, the American [enemy], as well as everyone who supports him and helps him to remain in the region. Your jihad is our jihad, and a joint jihad operation of this kind is a duty incumbent upon us all. Do not fear, we will release you, and when you [decide to] accept our offer, you will have to contact (…) in your country, and within a few days we will convey to him [instructions for] you.'

"I do not know whether the rest [of our group] received the same offer. We did not speak with one another on this matter, but we were all given travel permits and travel privileges. The intelligence officer told us that he would stamp our passports with a date preceding the September 11 attacks. As far as I can remember, the date was June, while we were already at the very end of 2001. He also explained to us how to act at the airport security checkpoints through which we would be passing en route to our country, so as to avoid being suspected of fleeing the war in Afghanistan."⁽¹⁾

Endnote:

(1) Al-Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), November 6, 2007.

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