

## Hunting for Bin Laden and Al Qaeda

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It is premature to talk about the details of a Bin Laden hunt, but rumors that he and Al Qaeda have had growing tensions with Sheikh Omar and the Taliban seem logical -- given the general unpopularity of the Arab, Chechen, and Pakistani volunteers in Al Qaeda. There have been serious tensions and some clashes in the past between Al Qaeda and Pashtun supporters of the Taliban. Bin Laden also has to be aware that being trapped in any siege of Kandahar may well turn into a massacre of non-Afghan supporters of Al Qaeda and that being killed by Muslim Afghan Pashtuns is not the ideal martyrdom.

This situation could be different if the Taliban and Al Qaeda both go into the countryside and if there is major popular support. So far, however, it is not clear that any major group of Pashtuns in the West and North of Kandahar will actually provide such popular support, and a \$25 million bounty is unthinkable wealth for any Afghan faction or warlord. (Although one can conceive of a strange bidding contest where Bin Laden tries to make a counteroffer and/or bribe his way to security.)

### Hiding in Caves, the Countryside, or Neighboring Countries

Bin Laden's much touted camps and caves may or may not be an asset.

Bin Laden has long had considerable strength in the area near Jalalabad. Mullah Yunus Khalis initially had control of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province. He is an Islamic extremist who is believed to have provided housing and training for Arab and Pakistani volunteers in the past, and bin Laden is believed to have several camps and cave complexes in the mountains nearby, including some near Darunta and Tora Bora, and a possible facility in Farmada, about 15 kilometers from Jalalabad.

Now, however, Jalalabad seems to be under loose Northern Alliance control and Khalis's loyalty to Bin Laden is uncertain. The Pashtuns in Jalalabad long objected to de facto Tajik control of Kabul before the Taliban took it over, and seem unlikely to want to be on the losing side in ways that would either make Jalalabad a combat zone or keep them out of power in Kabul.

It seems at least as possible that if Bin Laden is or was in the Jalalabad-Nangahar Province area, he would now seek sanctuary of some kind across the border in Pakistan -- if he could get support from elements of the ISI or Madrassas. Once again, however, many Afghan refugees in this area of Pakistan hate Bin Laden, rather than support him, and once again, \$25 million goes a long way.

Bin Laden is reported to have other cave complexes near Kunduz, but these presumably are now overrun by the Northern Alliance and it is unclear how he could have gotten this far north. Kunduz seems like to fall, and this is a main junction area with Uzbek and Tajik populations that are hostile to Bin Laden.

As a result, Bin Laden might move across the border with either Uzbekistan or Tajikistan and try to take shelter with anti-Islamic extremists in either country. Here, however, he would encounter very active Russian-Tajik security forces in Tajikistan, and Uzbek government forces with steadily improving U.S. and British support in hunting down the IMU.

The main Al-Qaeda camps in other areas are located in Kunar, Logar and Paktia provinces in the East, and Kandahar and Helmand provinces in the South. The Taliban had two large camps near Khost in Paktia province. He also had camps in Logar province.

However, Paktia and Logar now seem to be provinces where there is serious anti-Taliban and anti-Al Qaeda opposition in the countryside and many towns, and where Arab, Pakistani, Uzbek and Chechen volunteers are anything but popular. Money would again be a key issue in leading local factions to hunt down Bin Laden, as would the desire of local leaders and warlords to join in the victory and future control of the country. There were purges of Pashtun factions and warlords allied with the Taliban in these provinces in 1999, 2000, and early 2001 because they opposed Taliban ties to Pakistan and "foreigners." Money, ambition, power, and revenge are a powerful combination.

Bin Laden has camps deep in the mountains in northeastern Kunar province, with caves and sophisticated communications but activity in these areas would probably be detected by U.S. intelligence assets and the mobility of U.S. special forces and airpower is not limited by the fact these complexes are deep in mountain areas with no roads other than donkey trails and footpaths. Such camps could easily become rattraps rather than shelters.

If Bin Laden does stay in Afghanistan, his best bet might be in southern Kandahar and Helmand provinces, and the United States has repeatedly struck at a complex in the Kharqez district. Security again, however, requires extensive support from local Pashtuns and while major opposition elements do not seem to have emerged in these areas, U.S. Special Forces are believed to be active in the areas and Pashtun leaders have certainly encouraged such opposition.

As a result, Bin Laden might again seek support from the ISI and Pakistani religious ideologues and hide in Pakistan. At the same time, many of these areas also have Afghan refugees hostile to Bin Laden as well as pro-Bin Laden, and the Pakistani military have a significant presence in the area.

### **Fleeing the Region: Martyrdom and Bin Laden's Belief Structure**

There is, of course, the possibility he may try to hide in Yemen, Somalia, the Sudan, Iraq, etc. Certainly, he must have excellent false ID, have made extensive contingency plans and arrangements, and leaving his supporters and family behind is consistent with his belief structure.

Bin Laden is believed to have access to a helicopter that he could use to move inside Afghanistan or across the border, although any such flight would run the risk of U.S. detection. The borders are porous and subject to constant smuggling in spite of Pakistani, Tajik, and Uzbek troops. He certainly has the money to charter a fixed wing aircraft for either short or long distance flights if he can find an airstrip in Pakistan that does not detect the fact he is using it or will turn a blind eye.

This, however, raises a major question about Bin Laden's motivation. A more conventional terrorist like Carlos might simply hide. Bin Laden may have a very different goal -- to create some kind of dramatic martyrdom tied to another major attack in the United States. It is interesting that some Arabs have talked about his seizing some major religious shrine and holding it in the midst of Ramadan as a way of making a dramatic exit, and some have gone so far as to mention Mecca and Medina.

There is no evidence of such plans, but the West needs to be very careful about interpreting the real goal Bin Laden might have after a defeat in Afghanistan. We may be facing a murderous would-be martyr and not a would-be survivor.

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