

The confession. It was not a shocking revelation for a sound footed mind in tune with current trend of global events. It was, however, revealing U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,

in an attempt to justify U.S. presence in Pakistan, disclosed to the world that the United States created and funded the so-called Al-Qaeda. Hear her: "...the people we are fighting today, we funded twenty years ago. We did it because we were locked in a struggle with the Soviet Union".

The U.S. feared that the Soviet Union would control Central Asia, which could have been detrimental to its existence as a super power. The move started with the Reagan administration with full support of the congress, led by the Democrats. It was then decided that the Mujahideen be recruited to stop the Soviet Union expanding its tentacles of influence in Central Asia. The Clinton confession was specific, "... let's get some of them to come from Saudi Arabia and other places, importing their Wahabai brand of Islam so we can go and beat the Soviet Union". With the war over, Pakistan was left on its own to clean up the mess brought by the U.S. army; the stingers, the mines along the border, etc. That was not all, the recruited Mujahideen, as they called them at that time, became a threat to the United States covert operation in the Soviet Union. Osama Bin Laden, as a towering figure during the operation must be subdued. He was accused of many atrocities committed against U.S. interests worldwide. Osama therefore went into hiding.

Al-Qaeda, the label

For a very long time, the U.S. government was looking for opportunity to nail and prosecute Bin Laden in his absence. To do this under American law, the prosecutors needed evidence of involvement with a criminal organization. As with the Mafia, that will allow the prosecutors to prosecute the head of the organization. Therefore, Bin Laden must be seen to lead a criminal organization, even if he could not be linked directly to the crime.

The opportunity came in January 2001 with the trial of four men accused of 1998 U.S. embassy bombing in East Africa, in a Manhattan court room. The evidence for Bin Laden's involvement with a criminal organization was provided for the U.S. government by Bin Laden's ex-associate called Jamaal Al-Fadal. Jason Burke, author of a book titled, "Al Qaeda" told CNN in a exclusive video interview that the source, Jamaal Al-Fadal was a Sudanese militant who swindled Osama

of large sum of money in the 90s. He was part of most of the middle eastern secret services. This source, according to Burke, somehow ended up in the United States, and was taken on faithfully by the American government as a key prosecution witness, and was given huge amount of money to that effect.

Accounts of Al-Fadal was used as a raw material to build the picture of Al-Qaeda. The picture the FBI wanted to build was the one that will fit the existing laws that they would have to use to prosecute those responsible for the bombing. Those laws were drawn to counteract organized crimes such as the Mafia, drugs crime and crimes where people belong to an organization. There was also the need for a source who can willingly and happily testify that such an organization existed. The two scenarios were very important evidences. The picture Al-Fadal drew for the Americans of Bin Laden was of an all-powerful figure that heads a large terrorist network, with an organized hierarchy of control. "He also said, Bin Laden had given this organization a name, Al-Qaeda. It was a dramatic and powerful picture of Bin Laden, but it bore little relationship to the truth", said Burke.

The reality was that Bin Laden and Zawahiri had only become part of a disillusioned Islamic militants who retracted by the new strategy. But there was no organization. According to Burke, "These are militants who mostly plan their own operations and looked to Bin Laden for funding and assistance. He was not their commander. There was also no evidence to show Bin Laden had used the name Al-Qaeda to refer to the name of a group until after September 11, when he realized that this was the term the Americans had given him".

In reality, Al-Fadal was on the run from Bin Laden, having stolen money from him. In return for his evidence, the Americans gave him witness protection in America and hundreds of thousands of dollars. Many lawyers at the trial believed that Al-Fadal exaggerated and lied, to give the Americans the picture of a terrorist group they needed to prosecute Bin Laden. Sam Schmidt, defence lawyer at the embassy bombing trial admitted this fact: "There are selective portions of Al-Fadal's testimony that I believed was false, to help support the picture he helped the Americans joined together. I think he lied in a number of specific testimonies about unified image of what this organization was. It made Al-Qaeda the new mafia, or the new communist. He made them identifiable as a group, and therefore made it easier to prosecute anyone associated with Al-Qaeda for any act or statement made by Bin Laden, who talked a lot".

At a certain instance of the CNN interview, Burke was very emphatic: "There was no Al-Qaeda organization. There was on international network with a leader with cadres who unquestionable obey orders, with tentacles that stretch out and split its cells in America, in Africa, in Europe... that idea of a coherent structure terrorist network with organized capability simply does not

exists”.

Hunt for Bin Laden- a wild goose chase

It was the Northern Alliance who told the Americans that Bin Laden was hiding in mountains in Tora Bora, and they were convinced they have found the heart of his organization. The Northern Alliance were paid more than a millions dollars for their helpful information. The picture of the cave Bin Laden and his group were hiding, as painted by the Northern Alliance, was of an underground tunnel dug in the side of the mountains. The Americans exaggerated the sophistication of the caves to a fortress. The picture of the fortress published by the Times of London was that of a very sophisticated operation, and serious business. According to analysts of the fortress, it has multi-tier offices and bedrooms; secret exits on the side and environ, cut deep to avoid thermal detection; ventilation system to allow people to breath and carry on; the entrance large enough to drive trucks and even tanks; hydroelectric power; arms and ammunition storage facility; even computer and telephone systems existed.

So the Americans went to work, bombing the mountains of Tora Bora with the heaviest weapons they had. The Northern Alliance fighters were also recruited to hunt for these so-called fortress, and bring the terrorist group and their leader. But all they found were small caves, and empty too, or used to store ammunition. There was no underground bunker system, no secret tunnels. The fortress did not exist. Instead, the Northern Alliance freed some prisoners, they claimed were Al-Qaeda fighters. There was no proof of this. The Northern Alliance kidnapped anyone who remotely resembled an Arab, sell them to the Americans for more money, and the Americans parade them on the world media as Al-Qaeda fighters.

The Americans in full circle began to search for all the mountains in all the Eastern Afghanistan for the hidden Al-Qaeda network. Wherever they looked, there was nothing there, Al-Qaeda seem to have completely disappeared. The British then came to the rescue, with the firm belief they could hunt for Al-Qaeda because of their unique experience in fighting terrorism in Northern Ireland. They thought they could succeed where others failed. This is what the Brigadier Roger Lane, the British Forces commander assured the media on their arrival, the first week: “The hunt for Al-Qaeda and Taliban goes on. And we stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States and other coalition allies in the global war on terrorism”. Five weeks later into the hunt, when asked by a reporter how many Al-Qaeda they captured, he sadly replied: “We haven’t captured any Al-Qaeda”. “How many have you killed?” “ We haven’t killed anyone”.

All was a wild goose chase, because there was nobody there, the Al-Qaeda as an organization painted by the Americans did not exist. They were looking for a phantom enemy that did not exist, and missing the real threat. “What is evident is an idea prevalent among young, angry Muslim males throughout the Islamic world. That idea is what poses the threat”, concluded Burke.

By Ibrahim Usman