

The  
Astounding  
Story of the  
Al Qaeda  
Operative  
Who Plotted  
the Murder  
of Top CIA  
Officials

# The Triple Agent

*The CIA believed he was their spy who had convinced Al Qaeda he was working for them. With his help they were close to catching Ayman al-Zawahiri, Number 2 in the Al Qaeda hierarchy.*

*In reality, the man was a loyal Al Qaeda operative who was being used to infiltrate America's intelligence community. His mission was not espionage. He was sent to carry out a bombing that would destroy high-ranking officers of the CIA.*

| Chaim Rivkin |

**H**umam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi, the son of Palestinian refugees, lived in a village in Amman, Jordan. Like many around him, Balawi was motivated by Muslim extremism and cultivated a hatred for Israel and America. His eldest son was named for a prominent Palestinian hijacker.

Balawi worked as a doctor in a refugee camp during the day. At night, and in his other free time, however, he was occupied with entirely different sorts of activities. He sat at his computer and typed anti-Israel and anti-Western rhetoric under the pseudonym Abu Dujana al-Khurasani. The most caustic daily satire about Middle East news, especially in Iraq, flowed from his fingertips. He posted gruesome pictures of bombings of US troops and tanks accompanied with his inflammatory comments. Millions of readers in the Muslim world read al-Khurasani's column every day.

It was a study in contrasts. On the outside, he gave the impression of a quiet, even backward, unassuming man. On the inside, he was a rabid Muslim ideologue and one of the top five writers in his particular field, although nobody knew his true identity.

In America, such jihadist websites are very closely monitored, but there are also other intelligence communities around the world that follow online Muslim radicalism. It is a very effective way of learning about the Western world's top enemies. That is why in late 2008 the Jordanian authorities decided to keep an eye on his column. Whoever the writer was, he was receiving a lot of attention and using it to incite Muslim youths to jihad. It was very possible that he was in direct contact with Al Qaeda itself, since the ideology he espoused was very similar.

America's National Security Administration (NSA) maintains the technology to trace the identity of internet authors. Within America it would be very controversial for the NSA to use its tools to discover the true identity of an online writer like al-Khurasani. Abroad, however, no one

would protest. At Jordan's request the NSA tracked al-Khurasani and soon provided his address to the Jordanian authorities.

On January 19, 2009, at 11 PM, the Balawi family was preparing to settle down for the night. The others got ready for bed while the father began his "night job." Suddenly, the door was thrown open and Jordanian police stormed in. Everyone present was shocked when Balawi was handcuffed and led outside to a waiting police car.

He was whisked away to a secret prison and placed in solitary confinement where he was blindfolded for many hours. Later, intelligence officials interrogated him for hours on end. He was forced to undergo sleep deprivation as well.

The prisoner broke quickly enough. He gave them names of people that he had met over the internet, describing how the internet worked in the Jihadi community. But he had little else to offer.

The interrogation was led by agent Ali bin- , a cousin of Jordan's King Abdullah II. After a few days, Bin-Zeid recognized that his prisoner had a loose tongue and even looser fingers, but he was hardly a menace to state security. Balawi had little contact with the terror world. But if he was so easily manipulated, he could be turned into an important contact for Jordan's war with Al Qaeda.

## To Pakistan

In early 2009, America's counter-terrorism efforts were concentrated on Pakistan, where Al Qaeda's forces were centered. The CIA stepped up its cruise missile attacks and used its drones to crush Al Qaeda forces and search for its leaders.

America's weapons were so advanced that they could shoot missiles through the windows of cars as they were being driven by terrorists. They could target a small home in a narrow street with minimal collateral damage. And missiles could be redirected even after being launched in response to a change in the situation on the ground.

At that time, Barack Obama had just taken office in the White House. He continued the

War on Terror begun by his predecessor. It was important to him to demonstrate that he took America's security seriously and he was on the lookout for any help that was offered.

That was the situation when Jordanian intelligence contacted US officials. Bin-Zeid had spoken daily with Balawi in an attempt to find a way to use the prisoner. However, it was Balawi who came up with the idea first.

"You want me to help you?" Balawi said. "Here's what I can do for you. I have special qualifications since I'm a doctor. I can go to Pakistan for you and find out who belongs to Al Qaeda and who would be of interest to you."

The suggestion came as a shock to Jordanian intelligence. Suddenly, Balawi was helpful, offering to carry out a useful mission for them! The Jordanians did not assume any motive other than greed. After all, spies are paid top dollar for the right information. That would certainly be true regarding traveling to an unstable region like Pakistan and researching terrorists there. If Balawi were successful on such a mission, it could transform him financially for life.

The more Bin-Zeid thought the idea over, Balawi was too good to be true, but he was also too good to ignore. He decided to bring in the CIA. He called in the American officials and shared with them Balawi's offer.

"This may give us a foothold in Pakistan," Bin-Zeid enthused.

Admittedly, it sounded a bit odd that the doctor, who did not even have contacts with local extremists, was suddenly interested in getting involved with the most dangerous terrorists. Still, the CIA felt that there was nothing to lose. Chances were that Balawi's internet contacts and medical skills would be of interest to the organization. Maybe he could infiltrate them.

The CIA appointed an agent to oversee the operation and Balawi was given the code name "Wolf." The CIA supplied him with a passport, a visa to fly to Pakistan and sufficient funds to cover his basic travel expenses. The next day he departed to live among the primitive tribes of Pakistan.

## In the Nest

The CIA's sole connection with its newest agent was an occasional terse email message informing them "I have arrived," or "I'm trying to get a look around."

One day Balawi sent a message apologizing that he would be breaking contact for a



The most dreaded prison in Jordan



Balawi worked as a doctor in a UN-subsidized hospital in a Palestinian refugee camp. Inset: Balawi as a medic.



The prisoner began speaking long before it was necessary to resort to torture.