

Al Qaeda Doesn't Need Osama's Millions Anymore...

# Feeding The Devil

## How Western European Governments Are Financing Al Qaeda

For years, Osama bin Laden funded his Al Qaeda terrorist organization, personally shelling out tens of millions of dollars to plan and launch attacks. Although bin Laden has been eliminated, Al Qaeda lives on. Who is financing all of that terrorism? The answer is surprising: European countries such as Switzerland, Spain, Germany and France. Although they try their best to cover it up, they are doling out tens of millions of dollars in ransom annually, thereby financing Al Qaeda and encouraging more kidnappings.

- Shimon Rosenberg



It was a mild night on February 23, 2003. A group of four Swiss tourists slumbered peacefully in their sleeping bags in the quiet desert region of southern Algeria, a country in North Africa. They were awakened suddenly by the sound of frenzied shouting. A band of heavily armed men had them surrounded. The four women were told to cover their hair with towels. Then they were ordered at gunpoint into a rental van that quickly drove off with them into the night.

The distraught families of the four tourists knew only that they had vanished.

Over the next few weeks, the same story repeated itself several times. All told, seven other groups of tourists who were visiting the same region of the desert were awakened in the middle of the night, transported to an unknown location and seemed to disappear from the face of the Earth.

It didn't take long for the world to realize that these disappearances were not random.

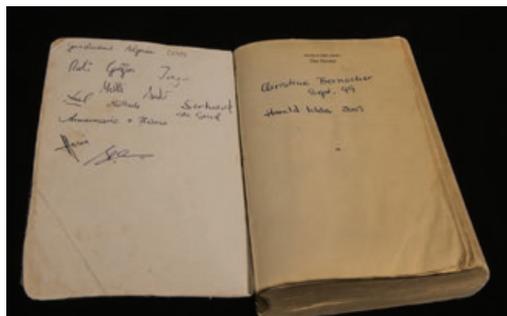
When Germany flew a spy plane over the desert in search of the missing tourists the aircraft returned with images of the tourists' abandoned cars, but nothing more.

When another few weeks passed with no word, an agent was dispatched into the desert on foot with a pair of binoculars. He spent several weeks canvassing the desert before he spotted something white.

Stepping closer, the man discovered a letter placed beneath a stone. It was written in sloppy handwriting and stated that all of the missing Europeans were under the control of an otherwise obscure jihadist group named the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (SGPC). The kidnappers presented a list of demands that European governments had to meet if they wanted the hostages freed.

## A Motley Crew of Terrorists

The unknown group was not very professional. They were armed with nothing but hunting guns and outdated Kalashnikovs. They did not engage in much advanced planning and did not try very hard to cover their



The 32 hostages had only one book among them and it was passed around from hand to hand. Some of the hostages wrote their names in the book.



Some of the items Swedish hostage Harald Ickler kept as a memento of his experience, among them photos of the terrorists.

tracks. Yet, in a relatively short time, they easily kidnapped over 30 prized tourists for ransom.

Most of those kidnapped were from Germany, though some were from Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. Some of the kidnappings were planned in advance, but others were apparently the result of chance. Among those captured was an Austrian couple, both 26-year-olds, who were noticed only because they lit a fire in the desert to cook some pasta.

From the manner in which the prisoners were treated, it appeared that their captors had not considered in advance what to do with their hostages. The only food they could provide was what the tourists had with them at the time of the kidnapping. The only gas the terrorists had was whatever they could recover from the hostages' vehicles. As the cars ran out of fuel they were abandoned one by one and the captives were forced to walk the rest of the way.



Simple metal plate and spoon Ickler used for all of his meals while in captivity.



The terrorists gave their hostages Arabic children's books to teach them Arabic. Some of the hostages studied Arabic in the hope of being treated more favorably.

The kidnappers did not prepare any accommodations for their unwilling guests. The European visitors went hungry for weeks. One of them, a Swede named Harald Ickler, became so famished that when he found a few crumbs left behind from a Danish butter cookie he gathered them carefully and placed them in his mouth one by one.

Despite the terrorists' ineptitude, their operations were unqualified successes. Virtually none of the hostages resisted capture. They raised their hands in surrender as soon as they saw the men hulking over them. Although the hostages far outnumbered their captors, they never once attempted to escape. Perhaps they were discouraged by the fact that they were surrounded by miles and miles of open desert wasteland.

Adding to the irony, the European countries involved all had competent Special Forces units capable of dealing with such a motley crew

of terrorists. Yet, for some reason, they decided not to mount a rescue operation.

The jihadists quickly took full advantage of the situation. First, they demanded a shipment of weapons. Next, they made political demands that the governments in Europe could not possibly meet. Specifically, they wanted the government of Algeria, their primary opponent, overthrown.

At first, the European countries resisted. But six months into the ordeal, a 45-year-old German woman died of dehydration in captivity. Now, they decided to pay the ransom.

America was deeply infuriated by this decision. US officials warned repeatedly, "Don't pay ransoms to terrorists!"

But their words went unheeded.

## "Humanitarian Aid"

Three suitcases were filled with €5 million (around \$6.5 million) in cash. A German official was given the unpleasant task of delivering the funds. He boarded a military cargo plane in Germany and flew to Bamako, capital of the western African country of Mali. There he joined a secret meeting with Mali's president.

In previous weeks, the president offered Europe an opportunity to solve the crisis without losing face. Officially, Germany had earmarked these funds as humanitarian aid for Mali. In actuality, it was understood by everyone that the cash would sit in Mali only temporarily. From there it would be sent to



The terrorists of the as-yet unknown terror group who held 32 Westerners captive in the Sahara Desert.