



Abdullah al-Faisal: Extremist Ideologue with Influence in the West

A NEFA Backgrounder on Abdullah al-Faisal
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Summary



[Source: Press Association]

In 2009, Americans have seen an increase in terrorism-related arrests of U.S. citizens who traveled abroad for training and battlefield experience. In January, Long Island, New York native Bryant Neal Vinas pled guilty to attempting to kill American servicemen in an Al-Qaida rocket attack on a military base in Afghanistan.¹ In July, North Carolina convert Daniel Patrick Boyd and a group of his associates were arrested for conspiring to wage violent jihad, and prosecutors alleged that Boyd and a co-conspirator plotted an assault on the U.S. Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia. Throughout the year, Somali-American men have been coming and going from the Minneapolis area to join forces with Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia.² In each of these cases, the conspirators were incited by ideological influences they had encountered on the Internet or in U.S. religious centers.

Certainly, the trend of travel by citizens of Western countries to conflict zones and training camps is of critical importance to intelligence agencies. At the same time, foreign travel is not necessary for the radicalization process to occur. Ideologues are well established on the Internet and have established direct channels of communication with their supporters through web-based chat systems.

¹ William Rashbaum and Souad Mekhennet, *L.I. Man Helped Qaeda, Then Informed*, The New York Times, July 23, 2009. For court documents on this case, see: http://www.nefafoundation.org/documents-legal-N_Z.html#vinas.

² For more information on Shabaab, see the NEFA Foundation Special Report "Shabaab al-Mujahideen: Migration and Jihad in the Horn of Africa" at <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefashabaabreport0509.pdf>.

In February 2009, the NEFA Foundation published a backgrounder on Anwar al-Awlaki,³ an American “Islamic scholar” who resides in Yemen, as an example of a pro-Al-Qaida ideologue who attempts to use the Internet to radicalize Muslims in the West. Abdullah al-Faisal is another example of an extremist ideologue who reaches supporters worldwide via the Internet and through extensive international travel, in order to influence them to receive training and to participate in violent jihad.

In 2003, al-Faisal became the first person in 100 years to be found guilty in British court of soliciting murder under section four of the Offences against the Person Act 1861, on the basis that he “encouraged others to murder persons unknown.”⁴ He was sentenced to seven years in prison, but was released in May 2007 after serving only four years, and was extradited, after release, back to his native Jamaica.



Al-Faisal arriving in Jamaica in May 2007. [Source: Jamaican Gleaner]

Not long after his return, the Jamaican government provided al-Faisal a passport, which he has already used to travel abroad, including several lengthy trips to Africa. Also within a few months of his return to Jamaica, al-Faisal established channels of communication with clusters of supporters in the U.S., the U.K., and around the world. His recent lectures are posted to numerous extremist web sites. He also gives lectures and conducts Q&A sessions via live online chats and accessed the pulpit of the mosque in Spanish Town, a city just west of Kingston, Jamaica. The content of al-Faisal’s recent sermons is nearly identical to the content of his sermons that were distributed by audio and video tape prior to his 2003 arrest in the U.K., which were used by British authorities as evidence to support their successful prosecution of him.⁴

³ “Anwar al-Awlaki: Pro-Al-Qaida Ideologue with Influence in the West,” NEFA Foundation, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefabackgrounder_alawlaki.pdf.

⁴ http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/featureddocs/royalcourtsofjustice_alfaisal.pdf

⁴ Nagra Plunkett and Howard Campbell, *Terror Preacher Deported: UK Boots Mentor of 7/7 Transport Bomber*, The Jamaican Gleaner, May 26, 2007.

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Al-Faisal has been credited with providing spiritual inspiration to men connected with terrorist acts and major plots including 7/7 London transit bombers Mohammed Sidique Khan and Germaine Lindsay,⁵ and James Ujaama, an American who conspired to establish a jihad training camp in Bly, Oregon.⁶

Biography

Abdullah al-Faisal was born Trevor William Forest in Jamaica in 1963.⁷ His parents served as Salvation Army officers and raised their family in the Christian faith.⁸

Al-Faisal converted to Islam at the age of 16 after being introduced to the faith by one of his high school teachers. He changed his name to Abdullah al-Faisal in 1983,⁹ the same year he first left Jamaica to study Arabic and Islam at a camp in Guyana.¹⁰



Salvation Army church in Jamaica that al-Faisal attended as a child. [Source: Jamaican Gleaner]

⁵ *Profile: Abdullah al-Faisal*, BBC News, May 25, 2007.

⁶ The Sunday Times, *British Imam Praises London Tube Bombers*, February 12, 2006.

⁷ *Sheikh Abdullah al-Faisal Won't Be Detained Says Security Ministry*, Television Jamaica (Kingston), May 25, 2007.

⁸ *Profile: Sheikh Abdullah al Faisal*, BBC News, May 25, 2007.

⁹ Paul H. Williams, *A Biography of International Intrigue*, Jamaican Gleaner, June 11, 2007.

¹⁰ Mark Titus, *From Church Boy to Militant Muslim*, Jamaican Gleaner, June 6, 2007.

The year following his trip to Guyana, al-Faisal traveled to Saudi Arabia to study at the Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The university is reported to have had a history of promoting a brand of Islam that is intolerant to other Islamic sects and to Christianity and Judaism.¹¹ Despite his education in Saudi Arabia at a university that is associated with Wahhabism, al-Faisal denounced the Saudi Salafi sect in a summer 2009 lecture in Africa, saying, “Saudi Salafis are the enemies of Islam.” Saudi Salafis “do not want to make takfir on their apostate leaders because they do not want to bite the hand that feeds them.” Al-Faisal then went on to say that the Saudi Salafi are “like the Jews.”¹² Salafis have published lengthy attacks against al-Faisal, saying that he “hoodwinks” gullible Muslim youth to believe that he is an Islamic scholar.¹³

In 1992, after eight years in Saudi Arabia, al-Faisal moved to the UK¹⁴ establishing a base at London’s Brixton mosque. From there, he traveled to mosques throughout the U.K. to preach, and tapes of his lectures were sold at Islamic bookstores all over the country.

The content of his taped sermons was brought as evidence in the trial that led to his conviction in 2003.

Current Scope and Quality of Influence

Al-Faisal’s ability to influence young Muslims to participate in violence continues to be a matter of concern as al-Faisal’s incarceration in the U.K. did not cause him to minimize the virulence of his public lectures.

He travels on a Jamaican passport and freely communicates worldwide via the Internet with Muslims who have adopted him as their spiritual mentor. His lectures are distributed in hard copy and online; complete collections of his taped lectures can easily be found on Islamist web sites.¹⁵

Al-Faisal has fan bases on several social networking sites, including Facebook.¹⁶ One Facebook fan page, which has close to 300 members from the U.S., Canada, and several African countries, appears to have been created by a Muslim student from Canada.

In New York, a small extremist group calling itself Revolution Muslim has adopted al-Faisal as its spiritual mentor. He is listed as one of the group’s board members on its

¹¹ Carlyle Murphy and Susan Schmidt, *U.S. Revokes Visas of 16 at Islamic Institute; Order is Part of Ongoing Crackdown*, The Washington Post, January 29, 2004.

¹² “Shaikh Faisal Refutes Saudi Salfi in Africa”, <http://connect.in.com/faisal-of-saudi-arabia/play-video-shaikh-faisal-refutes-saudi-salafi-in-africa-90735-ed287e89cf4086eb33af05fbf913a086b03fac75.html>, Summer 2009.

¹³ See “The Devil’s Deception of Abdullaah Faysal,” published on January 5, 2007, last accessed from <http://www.salafimanhaj.com/ebook.php?ebook=45> on September 28, 2009.

¹⁴ Mark Titus, *From Church Boy to Militant Muslim*, Jamaican Gleaner, June 6, 2007.

¹⁵ For example, see <http://kalamullah.com/faisal.html>.

¹⁶ Abdullah al-Faisal’s fan page can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/search/?q=abdullah+al+faisal&init=quick#/group.php?gid=19433465898&ref=search&sid=124567.1699301465..1>. Last accessed on September 11, 2009.

web site,¹⁷ and is described as the group's imam and spiritual advisor. The site features recordings of al-Faisal's sermons, as well as recordings of live phone calls with al-Faisal. Revolution Muslim members hold public demonstrations that are meant to be provocative, as group members display signs with anti-Semitic slogans. Group members have distributed CDs of al-Faisal's lectures in front of New York City mosques.¹⁸



*Revolution Muslim supporter at New York's Israeli Day Parade, 2008
[Source: www.revolutionmuslim.com/gallery]*

Abdullah al-Faisal's influence with young Muslims of all races and backgrounds can be attributed to the fact that he is recognized as a legitimate scholar and that his Arabic is fluent. He is able to translate key speeches and writings by Jihadi leadership and is able to explain ideological concepts to English-speaking audiences in a way that makes the material compelling. For example, al-Faisal brought Usama Bin Laden's "Declaration of War" to English-speaking audiences by publishing it in English¹⁹ and by delivering sermons to interpret the meaning of the message to British Muslims.

His influence in the U.K. is enduring. After his arrest in 2003, many of al-Faisal's followers did not pursue a more moderate path—rather, they turned to radical cleric Abu Hamza al Masri, leader of the ultra-radical Finsbury Park Mosque in London, to fill the void.

Even while he was in prison, al-Faisal intended to radicalize those around him by positioning himself as prison imam and leading prayers. Eventually, he was prevented from doing so by prison officials.²⁰

Prior to his incarceration, al-Faisal brought excitement to the mosques by discussing contemporary issues pertaining to local and global politics, which was atypical

¹⁷ <http://www.revolutionmuslim.com>.

¹⁸ See <http://revolutionmuslim.com/>, last accessed September 18, 2009.

¹⁹ Abdullah al-Faisal's translation of Osama bin Laden's "Declaration of War" can be found at <http://www.makingsenseofjihad.com/files/declarationofwar.PDF>, last accessed on September 17, 2009

²⁰ Abdullah al-Faisal speech, "Suppressing the Islamic Awakening," http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=130DD50272BED5D0, last accessed on September 18, 2009.

of imams in the U.K., most of whom delivered dry sermons in Arabic or Urdu that could not be understood by British-born Muslims.

In May 2009, al-Faisal participated in a conference in South Africa during which he explained the concept of *Al Wala Wal Bara*, which he described as “recognizing your enemies” and further explained that one should “hate them and exterminate them” as they pursue their effort to prevent Muslims from living according to their beliefs.²¹

In his lectures, al-Faisal accuses non-Muslims of attempting to make divisions in Islam in order to prevent Muslims from unifying against them. He warns Muslims not to be apostate simply in order to be accepted by non-Muslims. He further chides, “It doesn’t work for Turkey, which has not been accepted into the European Union.”²²

In 2008, al-Faisal delivered a speech in Durban, South Africa titled “Islam Under Attack.”²³ In the lecture, he stated that “honor” killing of women who have affairs is justifiable because “daughters are diamonds,” suggesting women are nothing more than a mere commodity.

Implications

Abdullah al-Faisal has a loyal following that is dedicated to promoting his ideology to others via the Internet and through in-person delivery of compact disc recordings. Additionally, al-Faisal regularly generates new material by giving public lectures, which are then recorded and distributed electronically and on CDs. Thus, the pervasiveness of his influence is spread quickly and broadly.

Al-Faisal has a proven track record of radicalizing and inciting young Muslims to violence. Al-Faisal adheres to the same jihadi ideology he preached prior to his arrest and during his incarceration, including advocating for participation in violent jihad. In Jamaica, al-Faisal may enjoy even greater freedom to circulate his beliefs than he had in the U.K. because he is even better known and his reputation as a well-respected scholar has been enhanced by his higher profile. His imprisonment in the U.K. may even have resulted in increasing his credibility and popularity.

²¹ Abdullah al-Faisal’s speech on the concept of *Al Wala Wal Bara* from The Islamic Awakening conference can be found at <http://www.kalamullah.com/faisal.html>. Last accessed on September 13, 2009. Speech can also be found at http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=130DD50272BED5D0, last accessed on September 18, 2009.

²² Abdullah al-Faisal speech from The Islamic Awakening conference, http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=130DD50272BED5D0, last accessed on September 18, 2009.

²³ Abdullah al-Faisal’s lecture “Islam Under Attack” was sponsored by the Al Ansaar Foundation, <http://www.alansaar.co.za/>.