

The terrorist attack on the American embassy in Yemen – the Modus Operandi and significance¹



The "Sada Al-Malahem" magazine (the Echo of Battles), published once every two months in behalf of the "Qaidat Al-Jihad Organization in the South of the Arabian Peninsula", published in its November 2008 issue (issue no. 6) a great deal of information about the terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Yemen, carried out on September 17th 2008.²

The front page of the November 2008 issue of the Sada Al-Malahem magazine

The Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is a branch of Al-Qaeda, the Sunni terrorist organization, operating mainly in Saudi Arabia and subject to Al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden. The organization opposes the Saud Regime, ruling in Saudi Arabia. In addition to several terrorist attacks carried out by the organization in Saudi Arabia and the abduction and murder of the American engineer, Paul Johnson, in June 2004, it is also suspected of involvement in a terrorist attack in Doha, Qatar's capital, in March 2005.³

¹ This document deals with the lessons from the global Jihad's most recent attacks and was sent to recipients based on a distribution list.

² For information about the magazine's first issue, see:

<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefaqaidayemen1008-3.pdf>

³ <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Al-Qaeda+in+the+Arabian+Peninsula>

The terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Yemen - Background

On September 17th 2008, several militants traveling in two cars attacked the entrance of the Dhahr Himyar district, where the U.S. embassy in Yemen is located. The first group drove up to the gate and exchanged fire with the embassy guards, using RPGs.⁴ A second car laden with explosives followed but failed to pass the compound gates. Sixteen people died in the attack.



Militant snipers fired shots at a first-responders unit that arrived at the scene.⁵ Different reports cite as many as five explosions having occurred during the attack. Reports also note that the attackers were dressed as Yemenite soldiers. The Dhahr Himyar district is a residential area home to embassies and five-star hotels.⁶ The U.S. embassy is located about 250 meters away from the entrance of the district, which is where the attack occurred.⁷

Even though the perpetrators were unable to breach the compound's outer perimeter,⁸ 16 people died in the attack,⁹ including Yemenite soldiers, civilians and one American citizen.¹⁰

One of the magazine's articles, titled: "The truth about the embassies", presents a number of reasons justifying the attack against the American embassy in Yemen:

1. The aim of the foreign embassies is to destroy Islam with the aid of the "heretic" government hosting the embassies.
2. These embassies have military attaches, responsible for strengthening the military bases on Muslim land.
3. These embassies grant political asylum to those who harm Islam and "plot evil schemes" with leaders who are loyal to them by the imprisonment of hundreds of Muslims and their elimination.

⁴ <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aF831eGsmcas&refer=home>

⁵ <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/09/18/embassy.yemen.blast/>

⁶ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2008-09/18/content_7036255.htm

⁷ <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=afHE5JQEJyII&refer=home>

⁸ <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26751142/>

⁹ <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/sep/18/world/fg-yemen18>

¹⁰ <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/09/18/embassy.yemen.blast/>

- 4. The embassies carry out missionary activities for Christianity in all the Muslim countries, and they defend the converts legally and economically, so that the Muslims will abandon their religion and accept Christianity.

Therefore, the writer of the article deduces that these sites are not simply foreign embassies, but are also military and ideological bases for waging war against the Islamic countries. According to the article, the American embassy in Yemen opened CIA and the FBI offices, responsible for the war against Islam; it recruited Yemenite agents from amongst the inhabitants, men as well as women, in order to exploit them in this war; perpetrated crimes against the Yemenite inhabitants using recruited agents.



Further on in the magazine, on October 30th 2008, the “Qaidat Al-Jihad in the Southern Arabian Peninsula” organization accepts official responsibility for the attack called the “Al-Furqan Invasion” (Ghazwar Al-Furqan)¹¹. The attack was carried out by a group called the “Al-Shahid Abu Ali Al-Harithi Brigades”.¹²

The acceptance of responsibility as it appeared in the magazine

¹¹ Al Furqan means the difference between truth and lies. This appears in the Koran.
¹² The Al-Shahid Abu Ali Al-Harithi Brigades takes responsibility - was also quoted in the Arab media, see: http://www.daralhayat.com/arab_news/gulf_news/11-2008/Item-20081109-82c55ff1-c0a8-10ed-011c-4d1652b139ad/story.html.

Abu Ali Al-Harithi is a Yemenite citizen who was suspected of being behind the attack on the American destroyer USS Cole in October 2000. He was killed by the CIA in Yemen in November 2002. A month after his death, in December 2002, an announcement was made by an organization named after him called "Al-Shahid Abu Ali Al-Harithi Brigades" –threatening revenge. In October 2008, a month after the attack on the U.S. embassy in Sana'a, activists belonging to this group attacked the security chief of the Marib's Madghal district, Muhammad bin Rebaysh, because of his direct involvement in the hunt for Abu Ali Al-Harithi and his collaboration with the American embassy in Yemen.¹³

The modus operandi:

The modus operandi used by the terrorists in this attack can be surmised from the acceptance of responsibility for the attack. Hereinafter is the evolvment of the event, as described by the official acceptance of responsibility, excluding a number of details regarding the attack and the preparations which the organization is unwilling to disclose:

1. The attack was perpetrated by two groups in two different vehicles under the command of Sheikh Lutf Muhammad Bahr (Abu Abd Al-Rahman) and six of his "pupils" whom he "educated for Jihad and the uniqueness of the Lord."¹⁴
2. The saboteurs placed armored shields all around the two vehicles, with the exception of the front mirror. They made two openings in the roof of the first vehicle and one opening in the roof of the second vehicle. Five saboteurs sat in the first vehicle, whilst two sat in the second – all in all a total of seven terrorists.
3. When the first vehicle arrived at the American embassy in Sana'a, the two terrorists who sat on both sides of the vehicle, opened fire at the embassy security guards from the openings in the roof of the vehicle. At the same time, the third and fourth terrorists got out of the vehicle and confronted the security guards at the front of the building.

¹³<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/11/05/1036308311314.html?oneclick=true>,
<http://www.swalif.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-156291.html>

¹⁴ The acceptance of responsibility mentions the names and code names of the terrorists. At the end of the magazine there is praise for the terrorists whilst stressing their adherence to Islam but without mentioning any biographical information which may provide details about their country of origin, age etc.

4. The driver of the first vehicle then drove towards the target and tried to cross the first concrete roadblock whose shape is curved. The vehicle parked at one of the turns and the two terrorists who were on both sides of the vehicle, got off whilst covering each other. The three – the driver and the two terrorists – comprised the break-in group. They removed the portable iron roadblock and a number of improvised roadblocks.
5. After the driver of the first vehicle succeeded in crossing the concrete roadblock, he turned towards his target, which had been chosen in advance, after both the terrorists of the break-in group moved aside whilst securing the area and preparing for an attack to storm the people inside the embassy.
6. The suicide bomber, who drove the first vehicle, advanced towards the wall of the building on the left of the embassy gate, causing a large opening. The two terrorists, who were on the sides, broke inside and “flushed out” everyone who was inside amidst calls of “Allah Akbar”. At the same time, they phoned their “brothers” at the propaganda committee and informed them that they had killed the American ambassador and his deputy, who were inside the embassy at the time. However, from the acceptance of responsibility it would appear that the two were not killed, but rather the Administrative Attaché, who later on was declared to have died in a traffic accident.¹⁵
7. In the meantime, the second vehicle continued to its target without any noteworthy obstacles, with the exception of the debris from the embassy which were spread out in every direction. Most of the terrorists entered the embassy building under heavy cross fire. After a few moments, the driver of the second vehicle received an order to proceed to the target and complete the assignment.

The acceptance of responsibility ends with the following threat:

“As far as we are concerned, there is no difference between the American embassy in Kabul, Baghdad, Riyadh or Sana’a. Death in the name of Allah in Afghanistan and Iraq is the same as death in the name of Allah in Sana’a and Riyadh. Slaves of the cross! We bring you bad news: we have prepared men for you who are not afraid of death, and they are willing to uproot you, as a worthy punishment for the death of the jihadi fighter Abu Ali Al-Harithi, his brothers and all the shahids.”

¹⁵ According to the media reports, no embassy personnel were harmed in the attack.

Significance of the Attack

Abu Huraira Al-Sana'ani, a member of the Shura Council of the Al-Qaeda organization in Yemen, writes about the significance of the attack on the American embassy:

He refers to four components: the timing of the attack, the location, the modus operandi and its excellence.

The timing of the attack:

Al-Sana'ani stresses that the attack was carried out on 17th of the month of Ramadan, which is the day of the Battle of Badr.¹⁶

He ascribes importance to this point and adds that this battle's heritage should be followed.

The location of the attack:

Al-Sana'ani states that the attack was perpetrated against an American military, economical, political, cultural and communications stronghold in Yemen, which supported the crusaders' war against the Muslims and Islam worldwide.

The modus operandi of the attack:

Al-Sana'ani states that a stakeout was carried out for a long period without leaving tracks, which led to the precise execution and timing. He stressed that the preparations for the attack were carried out carefully and with full alertness.

The quality of the Attack:

According to him, the timing, location and modus operandi are the best proof of the excellent quality of the attack.

After this explanation, he details the significance of the attack:

1. This was a preemptive strike against the United States, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, as rumors were leaked that American, Saudi and Yemenite aircraft were on high alert in preparation of an attack on houses where they suspected terrorists were hiding. As a result, they changed their hiding places

¹⁶ The Battle of Badr which occurred in the year 624 A.D. was Islam's first battle. This battle is considered until today as a Muslim symbol of great bravery.

which had been prepared in advance for emergencies such as these, and continued with their regular routines.

2. The Jihad fighters in Yemen have reached such a level of armed tactics that it enables them to surprise the enemy.
3. The attack proves the capability to determine the time and the location, under difficult circumstances and at one of the most guarded sites in general and in Yemen in particular.
4. The fact that the attack was perpetrated inside an embassy in Sana'a proves the ability to carry out attacks on targets which appear to be difficult to penetrate.
5. The terrorists were fighters who were willing to sacrifice their lives, as all the fighters wore explosives belts.

A writer named Abu Himam Al-Qahtani¹⁷ makes a comparison between the attack on the American embassy in Yemen, which he terms "the Badr of Sana'a", and "the Badr of Riyadh". The allusion is to the attack which the Al-Qaeda organization carried out on November 8th 2003, (15 Ramadan, 1424 Hijra), in the living quarters of the foreign residents in the Saudi capital. Al-Qahtani compares both attacks whilst referring to the following aspects: the strategy used, the timing and the location, the military plan and the message sent via both attacks. With regard to the military plan, Al-Qahtani states that as in the attack on the living quarters in Riyadh, the terrorists wore army uniforms belonging to the "enemy" as a deceptive measure.

¹⁷ Al-Qahtani is an active member of the Al-Qaeda organization in Yemen, and is wanted by the Saudi authorities. See:
http://www.alsahwanet.net/print.asp?sub_no=1_2008_09_18_65942