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## Behind Afghan Bombing, an Agent With Many Loyalties

By [RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.](#), [MARK MAZZETTI](#) and [SOUAD MEKHENNET](#)

This article is by Richard A. Oppel Jr., Mark Mazzetti and Souad Mekhennet.

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — The suicide bomber who killed seven [C.I.A.](#) officers and a Jordanian spy last week was a double agent who was taken onto the base in [Afghanistan](#) because the Americans hoped he might be able to deliver top members of [Al Qaeda](#)'s network, according to Western government officials.

The bomber had been recruited by the Jordanian intelligence service and taken to Afghanistan to infiltrate Al Qaeda by posing as a foreign jihadi, the officials said.

But in a deadly turnabout, the supposed informant strapped explosives to his body and [blew himself up](#) at a meeting Wednesday at the C.I.A.'s Forward Operating Base Chapman in the southeastern province of Khost.

The attack at the C.I.A. base dealt a devastating blow to the spy agency's operations against militants in the remote mountains of Afghanistan, eliminating an elite team using an informant with strong jihadi credentials. The attack further delayed hope of penetrating Al Qaeda's upper ranks, and also seemed potent evidence of militants' ability to strike back against their American pursuers.

It could also jeopardize relations between the C.I.A. and the Jordanian spy service, which officials said had vouched for the would-be informant.

The Jordanian service, called the General Intelligence Directorate, for years has been one of the C.I.A.'s closest and most useful allies in the Middle East.

In a telephone interview, a person associated with the Pakistani [Taliban](#) identified the bomber as Humam Khalil Mohammed, a Jordanian physician. Western officials said that Mr. Mohammed had been in a Jordanian prison and that he was recruited by the Jordanian spy service.

The bomber was not closely searched because of his perceived value as someone who could lead American forces to senior Qaeda leaders, and because the Jordanian intelligence officer had identified him as a potentially valuable informant, the Western officials said.

The Western officials and others who were interviewed spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the matter.

Current and former American officials said Monday that because of Mr. Mohammed's medical background, he might have been recruited to find the whereabouts of [Ayman al-Zawahri](#), the Egyptian doctor who is Al

Qaeda's second in command.

Agency officers had traveled from Kabul, the Afghan capital, to Khost for a meeting with the informant, a sign that the C.I.A. had come to trust the informant and that it was eager to learn what he might have gleaned from operations in the field, according to a former C.I.A. official with experience in Afghanistan.

The former official said that the fact that militants could carry out a successful attack using a double agent showed their strength even after a steady barrage of missile strikes fired by C.I.A. [drone aircraft](#).

"Double agent operations are really complex," he said. "The fact that they can pull this off shows that they are not really on the run. They have the ability to kick back and think about these things."

The death of the Jordanian intelligence officer, Capt. Sharif Ali bin Zeid, was reported in recent days by Jordanian officials, but they did not confirm exactly where he was killed or what he was doing in Afghanistan.

Jordanian intelligence officials were deeply embarrassed by the attacks because they had taken the informant to the Americans, said one American government official briefed on the events.

The official said that the Jordanians had such a good reputation with American intelligence officials that the informant was not screened before entering the compound.

Jarret Brachman, author of "Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice" and a consultant to the United States government about terrorism, said in a telephone interview that Mr. Mohammed had used the online persona Abu Dujana al-Khorasani and was an influential jihadi voice on the Web.

"He's one of the most revered authors on the jihadists' forums," Mr. Brachman said.

"He's in the top five jihadists. He's one of the biggest guns out there."

In many of the posts under his online persona, Mr. Mohammed used elusive language filled with references to literature and the Koran to describe his support for violent opposition to the United States-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"When a fighter for God kills a U.S. soldier on the corner of a tank, the supporters of Jihad have killed tens of thousands of Americans through their connection" to the opposition, he wrote in one posting.

Mr. Brachman said that Al Fajr Media, which is Al Qaeda's official media distribution network, conducted an interview with Abu Dujana al-Khorasani published in Al Qaeda's online magazine, called *Vanguards of Khorasan*.

The name of the bomber was first reported by [Al Jazeera](#), which identified him as Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi. The television network reported that Mr. Balawi was taken to Afghanistan to help track down Mr. Zawahri.

The attack was also embarrassing for [Jordan](#)'s government, which did not want the depths of its cooperation with the C.I.A. revealed to its own citizens or other Arabs in the region.

A statement by the official Jordanian news agency said Captain Zeid was killed in Afghanistan on Wednesday “as he performed his humanitarian duty with the Jordanian contingent of the [U.N.](#) peacekeeping forces.”

The United States, and the C.I.A. in particular, are deeply unpopular in Jordan, where at least half the population is of [Palestinian](#) origin and where Washington’s support for Israel is roundly condemned.

King [Abdullah II](#) and his government, while working closely with Washington in counterterrorism operations and providing strategic support for operations in Iraq, try to keep that work secret.

The Pakistani Taliban had previously said the bomber was someone the C.I.A. had recruited to work with them, who then offered the militants his services as a double agent.

The General Intelligence Directorate has received millions of dollars from the C.I.A. since the American invasion of Iraq, where the Jordanian spy agency played a central role in the campaign against Iraqi insurgents.

In the past, Jordanian officials have privately criticized American intelligence services, saying they relied too heavily on technology and not enough on agents capable of infiltrating operations. In 2006, the Jordanians were credited with helping to locate and kill [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](#), leader of [Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia](#).

The C.I.A. declined to comment about the circumstances of the bombing in Afghanistan.

Current and former American intelligence officials said the C.I.A. base in Khost was used to collect intelligence about militant networks in the border region.

The C.I.A. officers on the base used the information to plan strikes against Qaeda and Taliban leaders, along with top operatives of the Haqqani network.

United States officials have been applying pressure to the government of Pakistan to drive out the Haqqani network, whose fighters hold sway over parts of Afghanistan, including Paktika, Paktia and Khost Provinces, and are a serious threat to American forces.

A second former C.I.A. official said that Mr. Zeid’s presence on the Khost base was a sign that the Jordanian intelligence agency was using a spy to infiltrate militant networks in the region, and most likely to penetrate cells of Arab Qaeda militants.

“If the Jordanian intelligence officer had been vouching for this guy, the C.I.A. would definitely have wanted him on the base,” said the former officer.

The remains of the seven C.I.A. officers killed in the attack arrived in a military plane on Monday at Dover Air Force Base, where a private ceremony was held. The event was attended by [Leon E. Panetta](#), the C.I.A. director, as well as by family members of the slain officers.

*Richard A. Oppel Jr. and Souad Mekhennet reported from Islamabad, and Mark Mazzetti from Washington. Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington, and Michael Slackman from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Nadia Taha contributed research from New York.*

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