

# WHY WOULD THE US SHIELD FAHD AL-QUSO IN FEBRUARY 2012 BUT DRONE KILL HIM IN MAY 2012?

On February 10, 2012, the government went out of its way to hide Fahd al-Quso's ongoing involvement in terrorist attacks against the US. Three months later, on May 6, 2012 – the day before the AP published its story about CIA thwarting an UndieBomb attack – the government killed Quso in a drone strike.

## **DOJ's narrative of UndieBomb 1.0 hides Quso's role in it**

On February 10, 2012, as part of his sentencing, DOJ submitted a narrative telling one version of how Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to bomb Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit. In it, the government tied Abdulmutallab (who, after all, had pled guilty to a conspiracy to commit terrorism) to three AQAP figures: It claimed Anwar al-Awlaki, among other things, gave Abdulmutallab his final instructions that the attack be directed at a US plane and the bomb be set off over US soil. It explained how AQAP bomb-maker Ibrahim al-Asiri constructed the bomb and personally trained Abdulmutallab on its use. And it noted that while Abdulmutallab was training with AQAP, he met Samir Khan who (the narrative helpfully noted in a footnote) would go on to publish Inspire.

The narrative DOJ submitted on February 10 did not mention Fahd al-Quso by name.

## **Watering trees with UndieBomber 1.0**

That's odd, because Quso reportedly did play a role in Abdulmutallab's attack. According to a March 2011 AP story, Quso may have been the last person Abdulmutallab met with before he set off

on his attack.

**Before Abdulmutallab set off on his mission, he visited the home of al Qaeda manager Fahd al-Quso to discuss the plot and the workings of the bomb.**

Al-Quso, 36, is one of the most senior al Qaeda leaders publicly linked to the Christmas plot. His association with al Qaeda stretches back more than a decade to his days in Afghanistan when, prosecutors said, bin Laden implored him to "eliminate the infidels from the Arabian Peninsula."

From there he rose through the ranks. He was assigned the job in Aden to videotape the 1998 suicide bombing of the USS Cole, which killed 17 sailors and injured 39 others, but fell asleep. Despite the lapse, he is now a mid-level manager in the organization. Al-Quso is from the same tribe as radical U.S.-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who had an operational role in the botched Christmas attack.

In December, al-Quso was designated a global terrorist by the State Department, a possible indication that his role in al Qaeda's Yemen franchise has grown more dangerous.

Al-Quso was indicted on 50 terrorism counts in New York for his role preparing for the Cole attack and served more than five years in prison in Yemen before he was released in 2007. On the FBI's list, al-Quso ranks behind only bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri among the most sought-after al Qaeda terrorists.

**After meeting with al-Quso, Abdulmutallab left Yemen** in December 2009 and made his way to Ghana, where he paid \$2,831 in cash for a round-trip ticket from Nigeria to Amsterdam to

Detroit and back. [my emphasis]

Indeed, Abdulmutallab's tie to Quso is one of the only aspects of Abdulmutallab's trip in Yemen that has been independently verified.

In his book, *Dirty Wars*, Jeremy Scahill notes,

A local tribal leader from Shabwah, Mullah Zabara, later told me he had seen the young Nigerian at the farm of Fahd al-Quso, the alleged USS Cole bombing conspirator. "He was watering trees," Zabara told me. "When I saw [Abdulmutallab], I asked Fahd, 'Who is he?'" Quso told Zabara the young man was from a different part of Yemen, which Zabara knew was a lie. "When I saw him on TV [after the attack], then Fahd told me the truth." [first bracket original, second bracket mine]

Later in the book, Scahill reports that Zabara was assassinated this January by unknown killers.

### **Is Fahd al-Quso Abu Tarak?**

The details of Quso's ties to Abdulmutallab – particularly that the Nigerian was watering trees on Quso's farm – make me wonder whether Quso isn't the person Abdulmutallab called Abu Tarak in his initial confession on Christmas Day 2009.

In his opening argument in the abbreviated Abdulmutallab trial, AUSA Jonathan Tukul described what Abdulmutallab initially confessed after he was captured. Along with all the things later attributed to Awlaki and Asiri, Tukul said Abdulmutallab described having daily talks with Abu Tarak about jihad.

He told the FBI that he and Abu-Tarak spoke daily about jihad and martyrdom and supported al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.

In a narrative on Abdulmutallab's commitment to jihad also submitted for the sentencing based on his personal reviews of Abdulmutallab's interrogation reports, DOJ expert Dr. Simon Perry suggested that Abdulmutallab was living with Abu Tarak when in Yemen, though he says that was in Sanaa, not Shabwah.

While residing at Abu Tarak's residence in Sana, Yemen he was mainly confined to his residence and discouraged from any communication with the outside world (phone, email). During this period, UFAM spoke regularly with Abu Tarak and three other individuals who visited him daily, speaking with them about Jihad and martyrdom.

In any case, regardless of whether or not Quso is Abu Tarak, or whether Abu Tarak is an amalgam of AQAP figures, it seems clear that Quso played some role in Abdulmutallab's preparation.

And yet DOJ chose not to mention that this guy – who had been trying to attack the US since the October 12, 2000 USS Cole attack – was among the notable AQAP figures who prepared Abdulmutallab to attack the US.

#### **Was DOJ hiding that they knew how to infiltrate AQAP?**

Whatever Quso's role in UndieBomb 1.0, the implication of the timing is clear: he was central to the UndieBomb 2.0 plot. Indeed, it is almost certain that CIA asked AP to delay publishing their story to give time to kill Quso, who had just sent our mole off with another UndieBomb.

In other words, one plausible explanation for why DOJ did not confirm what other reports made clear is that it did not want to tip Quso off to what Abdulmutallab told them about him. That is, if they were already planning the op against him, they wouldn't want him to know they knew how Abdulmutallab had found him 2.5 years earlier.

That is just one possibility, of course.

But if that's the case – if DOJ obscured Quso's role in the government's most extensive accusations that Anwar al-Awlaki had an operational role in targeting the US – then are the claims about Awlaki true?