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## Suspect linked to al Qaeda

By Jerry Seper  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The American held in a plot to detonate a "dirty bomb" in the United States, probably in the nation's capital, met frequently with top al Qaeda leaders in the weeks after September 11 to discuss further U.S. attacks.

Federal authorities said Abdullah al Muhajir, who was born Jose Padilla and became a Chicago gang member, went to Pakistan and Afghanistan several times after the suicide strikes on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, meeting with Abu Zubaydah, a top lieutenant to Osama bin Laden.

The high-level meetings, authorities said, began in December 2001, when al Muhajir first met with Zubaydah, a major al Qaeda recruiter and a suspect in the September 11 attacks. Zubaydah was captured March 28 during raids by Pakistani police at a "safe house" in Faisalabad.

"There is absolutely no doubt al Muhajir talked extensively with Zubaydah concerning al Qaeda's plans to carry out a variety of attacks in the United States, including the use of so-called dirty bombs," one U.S. official said.

Al Muhajir, a New York native and convicted felon whose Arabic name translates to "the emigrant," was taken into custody May 8 by the FBI at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago after his arrival on a flight from Pakistan. He is being held by the U.S. military as an "enemy combatant."

The intended attacks included the detonation of a radiological dispersion device, or dirty bomb, against a number of targets, including government buildings in Washington, and separate explosions aimed at hotels and gas stations, authorities said.

Authorities said it was Zubaydah who sent al Muhajir to Lahore, Pakistan, after a meeting in Afghanistan, where he was trained in constructing and detonating dirty bombs. They said Zubaydah then arranged for al Muhajir to meet with several top al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan to talk about attacking U.S. targets.

His trip to Chicago on May 8, authorities said, was to begin reconnaissance for a bombing site and seek a source for the radioactive material for a dirty bomb.

The conspiracy was pieced together by the FBI and other

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federal law-enforcement agencies from information obtained from Zubaydah, who has undergone extensive interrogation by U.S. officials since his March capture. Authorities said that he did not give up al Muhajir's name but discussed enough of the plan to lead FBI agents to him.

It was Zubaydah who told U.S. interrogators earlier this year that al Qaeda was close to building a dirty bomb and might try to smuggle one into the United States.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said yesterday that al Muhajir is not cooperating with U.S. authorities. He is being held at a U.S. Navy facility in South Carolina.

FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III said the conspiracy, at the time of al Muhajir's detention in Chicago, had not extended past the planning stages, although al Muhajir is reported to have been carrying plans for an attack when he was taken into custody.

Authorities believe that other al Qaeda operatives are working on separate plans, although there has been no specific information on which targets may be involved.

President Bush ordered a "full-scale" manhunt yesterday for other terrorists, saying al Muhajir was only one of many "would-be killers" federal authorities have in custody. He promised that more would be arrested.

"The coalition we've put together has hauled in 2,400 people. And you can call it 2,401 now. We will run down every lead, every hint. We're in for a long struggle in this war on terror. And there are people that still want to harm America," he said.

In Budapest, where he is visiting with Hungarian government officials, Attorney General John Ashcroft said al Muhajir's capture by the FBI had "significantly disrupted" the dirty-bomb plot. He said the FBI obtained "very significant information" about al Muhajir's involvement with al Qaeda "in very serious terrorist plots."

At the time of al Muhajir's meetings with al Qaeda, authorities said Zubaydah — a member of bin Laden's inner circle and the organization's operational planner — was organizing attacks on the United States. He served as al Qaeda's primary contact for recruits.

Zubaydah, shot three times during his capture, is the highest-ranking al Qaeda member in U.S. custody. His capture was an intelligence and public relations coup for an administration that promised to bring to justice bin Laden and others responsible for the September 11 attacks.

Zubaydah is a Palestinian who was born in 1973 in Saudi Arabia, and he has traveled extensively under assumed names on forged passports and has been connected to other terrorist attacks, including the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen.

His suspected ties to al Qaeda were first documented by Ahmed Ressay, an Algerian convicted in a foiled terrorist attack in Los Angeles, which had been intended to coincide with the millennium celebrations in December 1999.

In court testimony, Ressay described Zubaydah as the "person in charge" of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. He said that after he graduated from the Khalden training camp in Afghanistan in 1998, Zubaydah asked him to acquire passports for other terrorists to enable them "to carry out operations in the U.S."

