

Profile: Anwar al-Awlaki

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Introduction

Prior to his death in a U.S. drone strike in Yemen on September 30, 2011, Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born Muslim cleric living in Yemen, encouraged attacks against America and the West by propagating radical online lectures to English-speaking audiences.

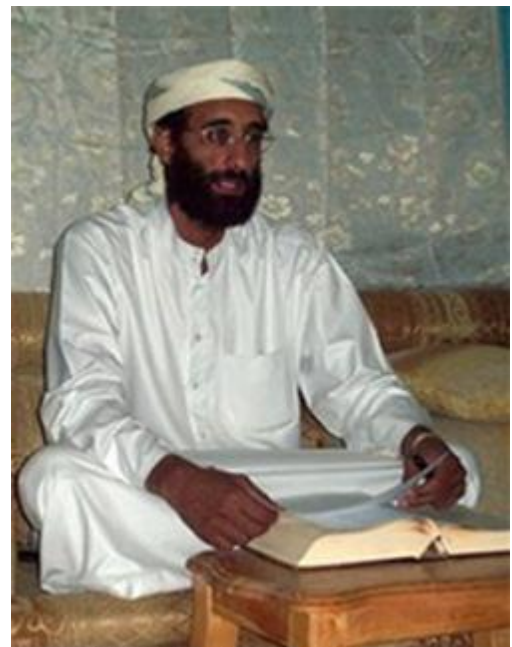
In many of al-Awlaki's videos, he called on Muslims around the world to kill Americans. In a video released on November 8, 2010, titled "Make it known and clear to mankind," al-Awlaki said, "Don't consult with anybody in killing the Americans, fighting the devil doesn't require consultation or prayers seeking divine guidance," he said.

Al-Awlaki also warns of future attacks against American interests both in the U.S. and abroad. In a video interview released in its entirety on May 23, 2010, he said, "Oh America, if you attack us, we will attack you, and if you kill us, we will kill you... These American soldiers heading to Afghanistan and Iraq will be killed. We will kill them if we can, there in Fort Hood, or we will kill them in Afghanistan and Iraq."

In another video released on March 17, 2010, al-Awlaki spoke about the duty incumbent on all Muslims to fight against the U.S. and proclaimed that "jihad against America is binding upon myself just as it is binding on every other able Muslim." Al-Awlaki further threatened that "America cannot and will not win... there is no rolling back of the worldwide jihad movement."

Hundreds of al-Awlaki videos, which were available on YouTube with a combined total of 3.5 million views, were removed by YouTube on November 3, 2010. Nevertheless, hundreds more remain available on YouTube and other video sharing sites.

Al-Awlaki's materials have inspired several American Muslim extremists to carry out terrorist attacks in the U.S. and join terrorist groups overseas. The Yemeni-based cleric reportedly exchanged more than a dozen emails with [Nidal Malik Hasan](#), the alleged gunman who killed 13 people and wounded 32 others at the Fort Hood Army base in Texas in November 2009. In his May 2010 interview, al-Awlaki called Hasan "one of my students" and in an interview held a month after the Fort Hood attack, al-Awlaki



Anwar al-Awlaki, courtesy of Flickr

explained that he first met Hasan nine years earlier when he served as the imam of a mosque attended by Hasan in the Washington, D.C. area. In their subsequent e-mail communications, Hasan asked al-Awlaki if a Muslim soldier serving in the American Army was allowed to kill his fellow soldiers, expressed his support of killing Israeli civilians and mentioned various justifications for "targeting the Jews with rockets."

Al-Awlaki has also admitted that, in the fall of 2009, he met with [Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab](#), a Nigerian man who later attempted to detonate a bomb on a transatlantic flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day in 2009. American officials have indicated that al-Awlaki personally instructed Abdulmutallab to detonate his bomb over American airspace to maximize casualties.

American officials have also indicated that [Faisal Shahzad](#), a naturalized American citizen from Pakistan who attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square on May 1, 2010, told investigators he was influenced by al-Awlaki. [Sharif Mobley](#), an American who was arrested in Yemen in March 2010 for his alleged links to Al Qaeda, also reportedly exchanged emails and met with al-Awlaki.

For several years, al-Awlaki has used his now-defunct blog to spread his sermons, literature and other materials that encourage readers to carry out attacks against Western targets. Several convicted terrorists in the U.S., Canada and Britain were found with al-Awlaki materials at the time of their respective arrests.

While al-Awlaki's sermons and literature primarily focus on condemning the West, he also reviles Israel and Jews. In his audio recording released on March 17, 2010, Al-Awlaki used America's support for Israel as justification for attacks against American interests. "What benefit is it to the American people to suffer for the sake of supporting Israel?" al-Awlaki asked.

In one post on his blog, al-Awlaki further criticized Israel and the Jews, claiming that the Jews "have a hidden agenda" and have infiltrated every government in the world. He has also promoted the conspiracy theory that contends that Israelis were responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Al-Awlaki, born in New Mexico to Yemeni parents, previously served as the imam of mosques in Denver, San Diego and Falls Church, Virginia. Two of those mosques were attended by three of the September 11 hijackers. Al-Awlaki left the U.S. in 2002 after he was questioned by the FBI about the September 11 terrorist attacks.

In January 2011, he was sentenced in absentia to ten years in prison by a Yemeni security court, which accuses him and two other men of being members of Al Qaeda and plotting to kill foreigners. The charges against al-Awlaki were announced as part of a trial against Hisham Assem, who allegedly carried out an attack in on an oil firm's compound in October, killing one person. The third defendant charged, Osman al-Awlaki, the cousin of al-Awlaki, is also still at large. Charges against al-Awlaki have not been filed in the U.S.

Terrorist Propaganda

Anwar al-Awlaki, who has been designated by the U.S. as a "key leader" for Al Qaeda, has encouraged American Muslims to attack non-Muslims and Western interests through his literature, sermons and other materials on his blog for several years.

Some of al-Awlaki's sermons instruct American Muslims to carry out "violent jihad" against non-Muslims. In "Constants on the Path of Jihad," one of al-Awlaki's sermons which has been posted on several Web sites commonly used by Muslim extremists and is based on the writings of Yousef al-Ayyiri, the founder of Al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, al-Awlaki says, "Jihad will also carry on until the Day of Judgment since we are told to wipe out kufr [non-Muslims] from the world." He also argues that jihad is global and "does not depend on any particular land...no borders of barriers stop it."

In another sermon posted on his Web site in February 2009, titled "44 Ways to Support Jihad," al-Awlaki explains that "Jihad is the greatest deed after believing in Allah and is the most needed." His lecture provides guidance on how to support jihad, such as giving money to the "mujahideen" (Muslim warriors) or their families after they've died, encouraging others to "fight jihad," conduct weapons training and raise children "on the love of Jihad and the mujahideen." He also asks Muslims to support jihad through "WWW Jihad," which he describes as establishing discussion forums and email lists to facilitate the sharing of "Jihad literature and news."

In addition to posting lectures on his blog, al-Awlaki has published articles in several online magazines published for Western and English-speaking audiences. Al-Awlaki wrote for *Jihad Recollections*, an English-language online publication put out by Al-Fursan Media, an apparent collaboration of online terrorist sympathizers.

Al-Awlaki, described by government officials as [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's](#) (AQAP) "leader of external operations," has also contributed to most if the editions of [Inspire](#), Al Qaeda's first-ever English-language magazine disseminated via the Internet. In the inaugural issue, al-Awlaki called for the assassination of all those involved in the controversial cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, including the cartoonists, publishers and the Western political systems that support them. All Western interests, according to al-Awlaki, are therefore permissible targets. "This would make the attacking of any Western target legal from an Islamic viewpoint," al-Awlaki argues. "Assassinations, bombings, and acts of arson are all legitimate forms of revenge against a system that relishes the sacrilege of Islam in the name of freedom."

Al-Awlaki, who has been described by the FBI as "a known associate and propagandist" for Al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, communicates with readers of his blog by enabling them to "contact the sheikh" with questions. Since December 2008, [Nidal Malik Hasan](#), the alleged shooter at Fort Hood, exchanged more than a dozen emails with al-Awlaki in which he asked for "religious guidance," according to authorities. Media reports indicate that Hasan may have also told al-Awlaki that he looks forward to meeting al-Awlaki "in the afterlife."

While it is difficult to gauge the extent of al-Awlaki's following, al-Awlaki's group on the social networking site Facebook had more than 5,000 "fans" prior to the Fort Hood shootings (the group was removed after the attack). A subsequent Facebook group has approximately 650 followers.

One indication of al-Awlaki's widespread influence is the number of extremists that have been arrested who were found in possession of his materials. "He has involved himself in every aspect of the supply chain



Awlaki's blog

of terrorism," said Stuart Levey, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. This entails "fundraising for terrorist groups, recruiting and training operatives, and planning and ordering attacks on innocents."

The following is a sampling of those who have been arrested on various terror-related charges who were [previously in contact with al-Awlaki or were found with his materials](#):

- [Jose Pimentel](#), who was arrested in November 2011 for planning to attack military personnel and other targets in the United States, posted at least fifteen videos of al-Awlaki on his YouTube channel. On his Web site, Pimentel calls al-Awlaki "The Destroyer Of The US" and posted transcripts of his messages. Pimentel reportedly accelerated his bomb-building efforts in response to al-Awlaki's death in an American strike in September 2011.
- Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif, who was charged for attempting to [attack a Military Entrance Processing Station in June 2011](#), subscribed to a YouTube channel featuring al-Awlaki videos. In one of the videos he made, Abdul-Latif laments that President Obama has "put a hit out on Anwar al-Awlaki, our brother sheikh."
- Naturalized U.S. citizen [Antonio Martinez](#), who was arrested in December 2010 for attempting to detonate what he believed to be a car bomb at a Maryland Army recruiting center, conveyed to an undercover informant his admiration for al-Awlaki. On his Facebook profile, Martinez similarly stated his esteem of al-Awlaki, writing, "I love Sheikh Anwar al Awlaki for the sake of ALLAH. A real inspiration for the Ummah, I dont care if he is on the terrorist list! May ALLAH give him Kire amen [sic]."
- Federal authorities recovered CDs containing lectures and speeches given al-Awlaki at the home of [Ahmed Farooque](#), a Virginia man who was arrested in October 2010 for allegedly planning coordinated terror attacks at Metro stations in the Washington Metropolitan Area.
- [Shaker Masri](#), an American citizen arrested in August 2010 for planning to travel to Somalia to join Al Shabaab, allegedly followed al-Awlaki's speeches and sermons. In anticipation of their future terrorist activities and attacks, Masri encouraged a government source to review videos and speeches featuring various Al Qaeda leaders, including sermons given by al-Awlaki.
- According to his plea agreement, [Paul Rockwood Jr.](#), an American convert to Islam who planned revenge attacks against those he believed "desecrated Islam," was a strict adherent of the "violent jihad-promoting ideology" propagated by al-Awlaki. Rockwood admitted in federal court that he devoted himself to al-Awlaki's teachings, including "Constants on the Path of Jihad" and "44 Ways to Jihad" – two al-Awlaki sermons that urge followers to support jihad through a variety of means.
- [Zachary Chesser](#), an American citizen from Virginia who was arrested in July 2010 for attempting to provide material support to an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group based in Somalia, told federal authorities that he watched online videos featuring al-Awlaki. Chesser also told federal authorities that he exchanged several e-mails with the Yemeni-based cleric. In one e-mail, Chesser explained to al-Awlaki that he had previously "prayed to Allah to let him be in Al Shabaab." Chesser, who distributes terrorist propaganda materials through a variety of Web sites, blogs and social

networking sites, gained media attention in April 2010 when he threatened the creators of South Park for satirizing issues surrounding the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad.

- [Mohamed Mahmood Alessa and Carlos Eduardo Almonte](#) – two American citizens from New Jersey who attempted to travel to Somalia in June 2010 to join an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group – allegedly watched several al-Awlaki videos. The men allegedly watched al-Awlaki's May 2010 video in which the Yemen-based cleric warned of future attacks against Americans in the U.S. and abroad. The men also listened to al-Awlaki's "Constants on the Path of Jihad" sermon.
- Federal authorities have alleged that al-Awlaki exchanged e-mails with [Barry Walter Bujol, Jr.](#), an American citizen who was charged in June 2010 with attempting to provide material support to [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#). Among other things, Buloj allegedly asked al-Awlaki how to provide money to the "mujahideen," or Muslim warriors, overseas.
- American officials have reported that [Faisal Shahzad](#), a naturalized American citizen from Pakistan who attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square on May 1, 2010, told investigators he was influenced by al-Awlaki.
- Al-Awlaki admitted that [Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab](#), a Nigerian man who attempted to detonate a bomb on a transatlantic flight to Detroit on Christmas Day in 2009, was one of his students. Al-Awlaki further disclosed that he had met with Abdulmutallab as recently as the fall of 2009 and that he supports Abdulmutallab's attack "as America supports Israel's killing of Palestinians and its killing of civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq."
- Al-Awlaki has also been linked to [Sharif Mobley](#), an American formerly employed at several U.S. nuclear power plants who was arrested in Yemen in March 2010 for his alleged involvement in terrorist attacks and his suspected links to Al Qaeda.
- Five men who [conspired to attack the Fort Dix army base in New Jersey](#) in 2007 were in possession of al-Awlaki's "Constants on the Path of Jihad" sermon and were reportedly recorded by an undercover informant enthusiastically discussing it.
- Mohamoud Hassan, who traveled to Somalia in November 2008 to train with the Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group [Al Shabaab](#), also listened to the "Constants on the Path of Jihad" sermon. According to his relatives still living in Minnesota, Hassan, a former engineering student, was killed in Mogadishu in September 2009. Hassan was one of several Somali-American men from Minnesota who have traveled to Somalia to train with Al Shabaab since the fall of 2008. That December, al-Awlaki praised Al Shabaab and called on all Muslims to "help them with men and money."
- Several terrorists convicted outside the U.S. also watched al-Awlaki sermons. Members of the so-called [Toronto 18](#), a group of 18 Canadian residents who plotted a series of terrorist attacks against the Toronto Stock Exchange and other government buildings in Canada, watched videos of al-Awlaki's sermons on a laptop at a training camp operated by members of the group, according to Canadian authorities.

- British authorities found al-Awlaki materials in the possession of [Aabid Hussain Khan](#), a British man who distributed terrorist related materials online to a network of contacts in the U.S., Europe and Canada, as well as in the possession of accused accomplices of the [2005 London suicide bombers](#).

Connection to Alleged Fort Hood Gunman

The aftermath of the [Fort Hood shooting in Texas that left 13 people dead and 32 others wounded](#) renewed public discussions about Anwar al-Awlaki and his influence on American Muslim extremists.

Four days after the November 5, 2009, shooting, al-Awlaki posted an entry on his blog praising Nidal Malik Hasan, the alleged gunman, as a "hero" who "did the right thing." He further commended Hasan for taking action against "an army that is fighting against his own people."

Al-Awlaki explained that the "heroic act of brother Nidal also shows the dilemma of the American Muslim community," and urged American Muslims to leave America and the West, as he himself did in 2002. "It is becoming more and more difficult to hold on to Islam in an environment that is becoming more hostile towards Muslims," al-Awlaki wrote.

Al-Awlaki reportedly [exchanged more than a dozen emails with Hasan](#) beginning in December 2008. Authorities initially indicated that Hasan looked to al-Awlaki for "religious guidance" consistent with research he was conducting for his master's degree. Media reports indicate that Hasan may have also told al-Awlaki that he looks forward to meeting al-Awlaki "in the afterlife."

In an interview held a month after the Fort Hood attack, al-Awlaki explained that he first met Hasan nine years earlier when he served as the imam at Dar Al Hijrah, a mosque in the Washington, D.C. area attended by Hasan. In their subsequent email communications, Hasan asked al-Awlaki if a Muslim soldier serving in the American Army was allowed to kill his fellow soldiers, expressed his support of killing Israeli civilians and mentioned various justifications for "targeting the Jews with rockets."

In December 2008, when al-Awlaki and Hasan began exchanging emails, the radical cleric wrote a post on his blog justifying attacks against U.S. soldiers, specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the post, al-Awlaki wrote that "the bullets of the fighters of Afghanistan and Iraq are a reflection of the feelings of the Muslims toward America."

A few months prior to the attack, al-Awlaki posted a similar message on his blog in a sermon titled "Fighting Against Government Armies in the Muslim World." In the sermon, al-Awlaki encouraged Muslims to fight against American soldiers, who he characterized as "the number one enemy of the ummah [Muslim nation]." Al-Awlaki continued, "Blessed are those who fight against them and blessed are those shuhada [martyrs] who are killed by them."

In an interview with a Yemeni journalist after the Fort Hood shooting, al-Awlaki claimed that although Hasan had viewed him as a confidant, he did not encourage the alleged shooter to carry out an attack in the U.S. Al-Awlaki did, however, say that he "blessed the act because it was against a military target. And the

soldiers who were killed were not normal soldiers, but those who were trained and prepared to go to Afghanistan and Iraq."

Background

Anwar al-Awlaki was born in 1971 in New Mexico, but spent most of his childhood in Yemen, where his parents were born. He moved back to the U.S. in 1991 to study Civil Engineering at Colorado State University. During that time, he also reportedly served as the President of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) and worked as an imam at the Denver Islamic Society.

Al-Awlaki then moved to San Diego where he earned a Master's degree in Education Leadership at San Diego State University. From 1996 to 2000, al-Awlaki also served as the imam at an Islamic center in San Diego, Masjid Ar-Ribat al-Islami. Two of the September 11 hijackers, Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, attended prayers there in 2000, according to the 9/11 Commission Report. While in San Diego, Al-Awlaki also reportedly served as the vice president of the now-defunct Charitable Society for Social Welfare Inc., the U.S. branch of a Yemen-based charity that is still active today. In 2004, federal prosecutors in New York described the charity as a "front organization" that was "used to support Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden," but the charity was never officially charged with a crime.

In January 2001, al-Awlaki moved to Falls Church, Virginia, where he began working on his doctorate in human resource development at George Washington University and served as the imam at Dar Al Hijrah mosque, one of the largest mosques in the U.S. One of the September 11 hijackers who attended Awklaki's mosque in San Diego also attended Dar Al Hijrah with another September 11 hijacker, Hani Hanjour, according to the 9/11 Commission Report.

In an interview with al-Awlaki following the September 11 terrorist attacks, he admitted to meeting with al-Hazmi several times in San Diego, but claimed not to remember any specifics about their discussions and denied meeting with him or any of the other hijackers in Virginia, according to the 9/11 Commission Report. Despite his denial, a congressional report states that the FBI had information that al-Awlaki "reportedly served as their spiritual advisor during their time in San Diego."

[Nidal Malik Hasan](#), the alleged November 2009 Fort Hood gunman, reportedly saw al-Awlaki preach at Dar Al Hijrah mosque in Virginia in 2001 and 2002.

Al-Awlaki publicly condemned the September 11 terrorist attacks, but also used them as an opportunity to criticize American foreign policy, especially regarding U.S. support for Israel. "Our hearts bleed for the attacks that targeted the World Trade Center as well as other institutions in the United States, despite our strong opposition to the American biased policy toward Israel" al-Awlaki said during a sermon at his mosque following the attacks.

Al-Awlaki also spoke to reporters and members of his mosque about the difficulties Muslims are facing in the aftermath of the attack. He explained that while Muslim Americans are against terrorist attacks, they are "also against the killing of civilians in Afghanistan" and U.S. support for "the deaths and killing of thousands of Palestinians."

According to the 9/11 Commission Report, the FBI first began investigating al-Awlaki in 1999 and 2000, after learning of his possible connection to [Al Qaeda](#). One of these connections was with Ziyad Khaleel, who authorities call a "procurement agent" for Osama bin Laden. Khaleel, who was the U.S.-based fundraiser for Islamic American Relief Agency – a U.S.-designated charity that listed itself as the partner of al-Awlaki's charity – may have visited al-Awlaki in San Diego, according to media reports.

Al-Awlaki reportedly moved to London in 2002 after FBI inquiries about his connection to September 11 hijackers, and then moved to Yemen in 2004. In his audio recording released on March 17, 2010, al-Awlaki admitted that he left the U.S. after "the American invasion of Iraq and continued U.S. aggression against Muslims, I could not reconcile between living in the U.S. and being a Muslim."

Several months after he left the U.S., al-Awlaki returned for a brief visit with [Ali al-Timimi](#), a U.S. citizen who frequently gave anti-Semitic, anti-Israel and anti-Western lectures at the Dar al-Arqam mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, and inspired a group of men dubbed the "Virginia Jihad Network" to attend [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#) terrorist training camps in Pakistan. Al-Timimi is now serving a life sentence for soliciting others to wage war against the U.S. and other related offenses.

Before the visit with al-Timimi, al-Awlaki was detained at JFK airport in New York during his layover from Riyadh to Washington, D.C. He was reportedly later released because a warrant for his arrest had been rescinded the day before.

Upon his return to Yemen, al-Awlaki worked at Iman University in Sanaa, according to the biography on his blog. The founder and leader of the school, Shaykh Abd-al-Majid al-Zindani, was designated by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2004 as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist because of his support to Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.