

# Backgrounder: Sgt. Hasan Akbar

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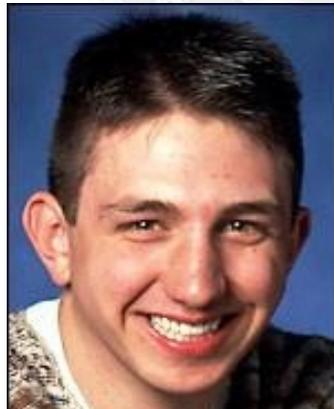
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## Overview

- On March 23, 2003, Army Sgt. Hasan Akbar killed two fellow U.S. military officers with grenades and wounded 14 others at Camp Pennsylvania in Kuwait, located 25 miles from the Iraq border.
- The attack occurred at approximately 1:30 am. Akbar shut off the generator that lit the camp, then tossed grenades, which he had stolen from a Humvee earlier in the day, into three tents where officers were asleep or preparing for bed. He is reported to have yelled, "We are under attack." He then opened fire with an M-4 automatic rifle when the men rushed outside.
- The victims were Army Captain Christopher Seifert and Air Force Major Gregory Stone. Seifert died from a bullet wound in the back of the head. Stone died from 83 shrapnel wounds.



CPT Christopher Seifert



Major Gregory Stone

# Indicators and Implications

- Like Major Nidal Hasan, who killed 13 and wounded more than 30 others at Ft. Hood in November 2009, Akbar appears to have been motivated by extremist Islamist beliefs, anger, and opposition to U.S. military action in Muslim countries.
  - Notably, in an email to Al-Qaida-linked imam Anwar al-Awlaki, Hasan reportedly asked if Akbar would be considered a shaheed (or martyr).
- Both Hasan and Akbar were born and raised in the United States. Hasan's parents immigrated to the U.S. from Palestine. Akbar's parents are African-American converts to Islam and were members of the Nation of Islam (NOI)
- Also, like Hasan, Akbar had a personal, academic and professional career punctuated with difficulty and failures.



Hasan K. Akbar



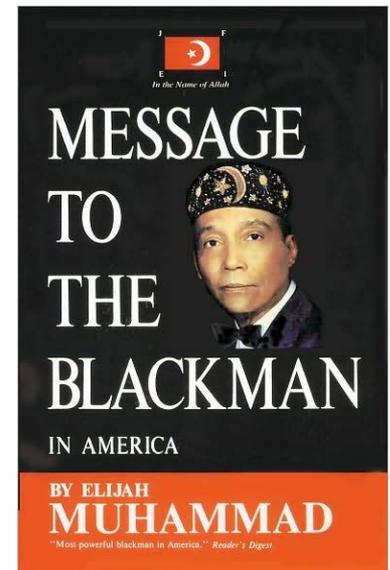
Major Nidal Malik Hasan

# Indicators and Implications

- Al-Qaida instructs its members to infiltrate enemy armies and to occupy other influential positions. However, the two military shooting incidents are not necessarily indicative of the presence of a fifth column. Hasan's communications with pro-Al Qaida ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki likely indicates his sympathy to Al-Qaida; however, Akbar was more likely to have been influenced by NOI's ideology than Al-Qaida's.
- Members of White supremacist groups and their sympathizers are intentionally seeking positions in the U.S. military. They do this not only to benefit from the training the military provides, but also to secure strategically advantageous positions for the race war they believe is on the horizon.
- Akbar complained of harassment from fellow soldiers who had tattoos indicating their racist leanings. Major Hasan also complained of harassment from fellow soldiers because of his faith.
- It is possible that White supremacist sympathizers in the military provoke already unstable minority soldiers to violent action. Their strategy is to exacerbate racial tensions in order to cause the tipping point that will ultimately lead to an all-out race war.

# Hasan Akbar

- In a November 2005 interview, John Akbar, Hasan Akbar's father, revealed his concern that his adherence to the NOI doctrine may have planted the seeds that led to his son's attack on fellow soldiers.
- John Akbar grew up in South Carolina in the 1940s, exposed to violent expressions of racism throughout his childhood. At the age of seven, he witnessed a lynching and stated that he remained haunted by the vision throughout his adolescence.
- He moved around the country before settling in California, where he married Hasan's mother.
- Hasan Akbar was born Mark Fidel Kools in the Watts area of Los Angeles in 1971.
- In 1973, John Akbar (then known as John Kools) served a prison sentence in Las Vegas. There, he came into contact with another inmate who introduced him to NOI ideology, which Akbar said resonated with him because of the underlying premise that the black men are the "Gods of the Universe" and their enemy, the white man, is the "devil."



## Hasan Akbar



John Akbar and Quran Bilal leaving court martial hearing at Ft. Bragg on April 18, 2005 [Source: Associated Press]

- After his release from jail, John Akbar returned to his family in California. He introduced his wife to the teachings of NOI and changed the family surname from Kools to Akbar. They changed their son's name from Mark Fidel Kools to Hasan Karim Akbar.
- According to John Akbar, after several years with NOI, he came to realize that the NOI's teachings were divisive. He decided to leave NOI, but Akbar's mother intended to stay with the group. She left her husband and took her children to South Los Angeles. They moved into a place directly across the street from their new mosque, the Bilal Islamic Center, which is tied to NOI and to Saudi financiers.

# Hasan Akbar

- Bilal Islamic Center imam Abdel Karim Hasan stated in an interview that he was raised by his mother first in the Moorish Science Temple, then as a member of NOI. He claims to have been sent to Los Angeles in 1971 by Elijah Muhammad to open a temple in South Central Los Angeles. After Elijah Muhammad's death, the imam accepted money from a "Saudi businessman" to rebuild the Islamic Center in 2000.
- In 2009, the Bilal Islamic Center dedicated its school in the name of Elijah Muhammad's son, W. Deen Muhammed, which indicates that the center may have followed a more moderate path after Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975 rather than follow the controversial leadership of Louis Farrakhan.



The Bilal Islamic Center in Los Angeles, California

## Hasan Akbar

- In Los Angeles, Hasan Akbar's mother, Quran, married William Muhammad Bilal, a convicted felon. That marriage lasted for five years. Bilal pleaded guilty for illegal possession of four guns in September 2003.
- Hasan Akbar's family moved from California to Baton Rouge, LA in 2002.
- Akbar received a degree in aeronautical and mechanical engineering after nine years of study at the University of California, Davis. The achievement left him in debt, and he joined the Army in order to pay it off.
- Akbar enrolled in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. Most graduate with the rank of lieutenant. Akbar left the program as a sergeant.
- His poor performance in the Army led to a demotion from a squad leader's position to a more menial position in a mine-clearing battalion.



Hasan K. Akbar

# Hasan Akbar

- Early in the trial proceedings, Akbar was represented by a civilian attorney Wazir-Ali Muhammad al-Haqq. Al-Haqq was once a member of the Nation of Islam but claims to have left NOI because of disagreement over Louis Farrakhan's leadership.
- Al-Haqq said he began following Akbar's case when he was in Los Angeles on vacation and by chance attended a fund-raiser for Akbar's defense. He said Akbar's family invited him to attend a trial strategy meeting at Fort Knox in March during Akbar's arraignment. At that point, Al-Haqq was hired to lead the defense.
- Al-Haqq had no direct experience in death-penalty cases, nor did the two Army officers who have been assigned as counsel.
- Eventually, Al Haqq withdrew his representation over lack of payment.

# Hasan Akbar

- Akbar dozed off several times during pretrial hearings. According to his defense attorneys, Akbar had a history of falling asleep during meetings and had sought help for the problem from the Army. He was alleged to have suffered from sleep apnea.
- During the trial, Akbar's defense claimed that Akbar's history of depression and mental instability led to the attack. The defense stated that he was diagnosed with depression and an adjustment disorder when he was 14 because of his stepfather's sexual abuse of his sister.
- His lawyers argued that his issues with mental illness grew worse over the years, and he became paranoid and his behavior was often irrational. Witnesses stated that Akbar was rarely in the company of others and was seen talking to himself.



Hasan K. Akbar

# Indicators of Ideological Motivations

Hasan Akbar kept a diary in which his will to murder fellow soldiers rather than kill fellow Muslims in Iraq was expressed:

- "I will have to decide to kill my Muslim brothers fighting for Saddam Hussein or my battle buddies. . . . I may not have killed any Muslims, but being in the Army is the same thing. I may have to make a choice very soon on who to kill." (written one month prior to the attack)
- "My life will not be complete unless America is destroyed." (written five years prior to attack)
- In 1992, Akbar wrote in his diary, "I made a promise that if I am not able to achieve success because of some Caucasians, I will kill as many as possible."
- A 1993 entry states, "I do not like the military. They have too much control over people's lives. I suppose I am just anti-Government. A Muslim should see himself as a Muslim only. His loyalty should be to Islam only." Despite making this statement, Akbar joined the military in 1998.

# Indicators of Ideological Motivations

- According to a written statement by Akbar's father, Akbar had complained to superiors about harassment from fellow soldiers because he was the only African American and the only Muslim in his company. The military confirmed that there was no investigation into Akbar's complaints.
- His father wrote that he was put in a platoon with soldiers who had Nazi and other racist symbol tattoos. In response to the verbal abuse and harassment, Akbar wrote in his diary, "I suppose they want to punk me or just humiliate me. I am not going to do anything about it as long as I stay here. But as soon as I am in Iraq, I am going to try and kill as many of them as possible."



James Douglas Ross, former military intelligence officer in Iraq. [source: Southern Poverty Law Center]

- After the attack, Akbar reportedly stated to arresting officers, "You guys are coming into our countries, and you're going to rape our women and kill our children."

# Sentencing

- In April 2005, Hasan Akbar was sentenced to death by a military jury at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.
- Currently, his case is in the appeals process. If the sentence is not lifted, Akbar is condemned to die by lethal injection.
- According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the last military execution took place on April 13, 1961. Currently eight former military officers, including Akbar, are on death row at the U.S. Discipline Barracks in Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.



Hasan K. Akbar

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