

of terrorist-training camps, had decided to reconstitute deep inside Pakistani cities with the assistance of Pakistani extremists.

Their retreat stopped for a time in Peshawar, the biggest city along the Afghan frontier. But Arabs like Zubaydah and foreigners like Padilla stood out too starkly among the ethnic Pashtuns along the border. So they and their Pakistani sponsors decided to move Zubaydah and his men to Pakistan's second largest city, Lahore, 250 miles to the southeast. Al Qaeda had several safe houses, equipped with satellite phones and laptops with Internet connections, up and running by late January. Pakistani investigators say Padilla spent most of February in Lahore surfing the Net in search of how to make a radioactive bomb.

For his part, Abu Zubaydah moved again, this time to the grimy industrial town of Faisalabad. He lived there with other Qaeda and Pakistani militants in a nondescript two-story house surrounded by a high wall, on top of which they installed a fence of high-voltage electrical wires. From there, Abu Zubaydah presided over the expansion of Qaeda cells in other large Pakistani cities, especially Karachi, a multiethnic, coastal metropolis of 12 million, where foreign Qaeda can blend in.

PADILLA FIRST SURFACED IN February when he went to the American Consulate in Karachi to get a new passport. The consulate, suspicious of a Hispanic with an assumed Muslim name in Pakistan, later flagged U.S. intelligence operatives, including FBI investigators. Not long afterward, American officials say, Pakistani authorities detained Padilla and a non-American associate for investigation on possible immigration violations, then let them go.

Around the same time, CIA technicians were homing in on Zubaydah's many satellite phone calls from Faisalabad. On March 28, local authorities, assisted by FBI and CIA representatives, conducted raids on about a dozen suspected Qaeda safe houses around Pakistan, capturing huge caches of Qaeda computers and documents. More important, they seized a number of suspected Qaeda operatives, including Zubaydah. Gravely wounded in a shoot-out, Zubaydah began to tell interrogators about how he had hooked up late last year in the Afghan city of Khowst with an American-born Qaeda recruit whose name he didn't know. As the two men escaped Afghanistan together, Zubaydah said, the American would-be terrorist told him he had a big plan to launch a major attack on his homeland. The plan involved creating and detonating a radiological dispersion device,

THE SUSPECT

How accused 'dirty bomb' plotter Jose Padilla went from gangland Chicago to Osama bin Laden

From Taco B To Al Qaeda

BY ARIAN CAMPO-FLORES AND DIRK JOHNSON

JOSE PADILLA, A.K.A. ABDULLAH AL-MUHAMMAD, was one of those quiet, sweet kids the neighborhood believe got into trouble with the law. Growing up in Chicago's tough West Side in the late '70s and '80s, Jose was a known street thug and Latin Disciple with an expanding rap sheet. At 15, Padilla and a friend mugged a man in the street, taking his money and watch. When the guy tried to chase them down, Padilla's partner

ended up in the stomach. As he lay bleeding, Padilla kicked him hard in the head, he later told police, because he "felt like it." The victim died. Padilla did a stint in juvenile hall.

It's a long way from "juvey" to the Navy brig in Charleston, S.C., where Padilla, now 31, is being held as an enemy combatant for his alleged role in a Qaeda dirty-bomb plot. Investigators are still trying to figure

out why the Brooklyn-born Puerto Rican Roman Catholic wound up converting to radical Islam and joining ranks with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Maybe Padilla was just a lonely loser who took a bizarre turn. Law-enforcement agents are more concerned about another ominous possibility: that he was part of a larger homegrown network of bin Laden recruits.

In 1991 Padilla and his



FAR FROM HOME: Padilla (left) with unidentified relatives