**Ayman al-Zawahiri**

Ayman al-Zawahiri has progressed from being a doctor to the head of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and then onto become Bin Laden's chief deputy within the al-Qaeda movement. As of February 2005, he was listed by the FBI as the second most wanted terrorist in the world.



Born on 19 June 1951, Zawahiri grew up in a fairly well-to-do family outside of Cairo. His parents were both of distinguished Egyptian families, although they were not exceptionally wealthy. He was raised in a religious manner, but his parents were not exceptionally pious. He spent his childhood in the suburb of Maadi, and despite his parents' relative prosperity, his family was never integrated with the cosmopolitan social scene dominated by Westerners and more Westernized Egyptians.

In 1966 Egypt was boiling over with unrest, particularly stemming from Islamic groups which desired to rid Egypt of Western influence and to mold the country into a more Islamic society. Zawahiri was caught up in this wave and as a 15 year old worked to form a cell as part of the **Muslim Brotherhood**, **the largest and oldest fundamentalist group in Egypt**. The cell contained Ayman's brother Mohammed and three of their friends. Zawahiri became the emir of the group. At this point in time, the young militant was not concerned with anything but local issues in Egypt. He believed the current state of Egyptian affairs was un-Islamic and desired to instate Sharia law. Also, Zawahiri had grand visions about restoring the caliphate in Egypt as a vanguard for uniting the Islamic world under one banner.

By 1974, Zawahiri's group claimed 40 members. Around this time, he was attending Cairo University medical school specializing in surgery. His radicalism was a secret part of his life, and not readily apparent. His attire was Western as he did not wear traditional clothing. The only signs to his family of his underground life were sympathetic comments about acts by Islamic extremists. The recruiting base of the university helped the movement grow, as all grassroots political organizations in Egypt relied on the students. In the late 1970s, the cell ran by Zawahiri joined with three other groups to become Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) under the leadership of Kamal Habib. Upon graduation in 1974, Zawahiri worked as a surgeon with the Egyptian army outside Cairo for three years. In 1978, he married Azza Nowair, a young woman who had become fervently religious at university.

Zawahiri's life took a dramatic turn in 1980 when he was invited to travel to Pakistan to serve as a doctor in support of the Afghan cause against the Soviets. The invitation came from the director of the Muslim Brotherhood clinic Zawahiri was working in at the time. He traveled to Peshawar for four months working under the Red Crescent. He treated primarily Afghan refugees fleeing from the conflict into Pakistan. Not only did he work in Peshawar, but he made several trips into Afghanistan proper with tribesman. He returned to Pakistan in March 1981 and stayed for another two months.

Further radicalized by his experiences, Zawahiri was also provoked by the peace treaty signed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat with Israel in April 1979. He now began planning a total revolution in earnest. His main efforts were to recruit Egyptian army officers who possessed not only military experience, but access to weapons as well. He relied on Aboud al-Zumar, an intelligence officer and a war hero. Zumar devised a plot to kill the current Egyptian leadership and then broadcast propaganda throughout the country to incite popular revolt. Another member in Zawahiri's cell, Isam al-Qamari, was also crucial in his efforts. Qamari was more of a charismatic leader than Zawahiri and was often deferred to on major decisions. In February 1981, Qamari's efforts were found out by the government due to a chance release, which caused Sadat to order a major crackdown on diverse underground movements in Egypt. While most of the EIJ leadership was arrested, Zawahiri remained a free man.

The assassination of Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981 had serious consequences for Zawahiri, even though he claims to only have heard about the plot several hours before the killing took place. For unknown reasons, he did not fear the response of the Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, and lingered in Egypt until the end of the month. On his way to airport to leave for a trip to Pakistan, Zawahiri was arrested for alleged involvement in the plot. He was believed to have major information related to the plot and as most prisoners in Egyptian prisoners in the time, was tortured mercilessly. His interrogators were particularly interested in the whereabouts of Isam al-Qamari, who was eventually captured when he attempted to contact Ayman through the Zawahiri family.

Zawahiri was indicted along with over three hundred other extremists in the trial of Sadat's alleged killers. The Egyptian government had dragged in most of the important Islamic militants in the country. The trial was covered by the international press and Zawahiri's knowledge of English made him the de facto spokesman for the defendants. Speaking on camera, he speaks on behalf of his fellow inmates as good Muslims and rails against Western forces, notably Zionism and communism. During his time in prison, he came into contact with the so-called blind sheikh, Omar Abdel Rahman, who was the spiritual leader of the Egyptian Islamic Group (EIG), a rival of EIJ. Zawahiri was released from prison in 1984, radicalized by his traumatic experiences. He left Egypt and traveled to Jidda, Saudi Arabia in 1985.

From Jidda, Zawahiri continued on to Peshawar, Pakistan soon after. He was joined by his brother Mohammed and Sayyid Imam, another Egyptian militant, and the three reportedly went about reforming EIJ. His main efforts were not in line with Abdullah Azzam, the leading Arab Afghan and Bin Laden's partner, but instead he directly sought out closer contact with Bin Laden. He managed to get several EIJ members around Bin Laden. EIJ benefited from the flow of funds from Bin Laden at the expense of their rival the Egyptian Islamic Group. Zawahiri cultivated a close relationship with Bin Laden and provided him with personal medical care. Bin Laden strayed from his mentor Azzam over the question of who would be targeted in the jihad. Azzam was reluctant to fight fellow Muslims, specifically the regimes in Saudi Arabia and Europe. On 24 November 1989, the militant was killed in a car bombing. Accusations of responsibility for the attack have been directed at both Zawahiri and Bin Laden, but no concrete evidence has ever surfaced.

Following the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, the Arab Afghans returned mostly to their own countries. In 1992, Zawahiri instead traveled to join Bin Laden in Sudan as he did not feel it would be safe for him to return to Egypt. Again, the militant went to work reestablishing EIJ, now with a base adjacent to Egypt. Funding was a major issue for the group, as Bin Laden, the primary financier of the jihad, was frustrated by the conflict between EIJ and EIG and was reluctant to fund either party. Zawahiri admonished several EIJ members who sought to provide for themselves through petty theft. He made a weak attempt to raise funds within the United States. Upon his failure in that effort, he resigned himself to working closely with Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda apparatus. The cost of greater funding was increasing loss of strategic control over the organization, as Bin Laden was interested in waging jihad against the "far enemy" of the United States and not in directly working to undermine local regimes. This was a split from the traditional EIJ ideology that focused on creating an Islamic state in Egypt. The shift caused consternation within the EIJ ranks, however Zawahiri felt it was necessary to maintain the organization at all.

During his time in Sudan, Zawahiri directed a fairly innovative campaign against the Egyptian government. His reliance on suicide bombers was unusual for the time and had little precedent in past Islamic terror. Abortive attacks were made on the Egyptian Interior Minister and Prime Minister in 1993. EIJ was dealt a major setback that same year when the membership director was arrested along with a computer database filled with information on the members of the organization. Roughly one thousand militants were rounded up and three hundred put on trial. The arrests were made despite Zawahiri's attempts to prevent such a security breach by creating a secretive cell structure within the organization. Zawahiri himself was further convinced of the futility of operating against Egypt without a foreign safe haven. During this period, he traveled extensively throughout the world spreading the work of the organization. Meanwhile, his organization was severely weakened by the wave of arrests.

In June 1995, EIJ and EIG worked in concert to make an attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's life. The attack failed to kill the President and drove the government to an unprecedented series of moves against Islamic militancy. Several incidents in Sudan leave credible evidence that Egyptian and Saudi intelligence made attempts on Zawahiri's and Bin Laden's life. At the same time, the Sudanese government was feeling increased international pressure to no longer provide sanctuary for militants. An incident involving Egyptian intelligence seems to be the precipitating cause of Zawahiri and Bin Laden's exit from Sudan. Reportedly, Egyptian agents kidnapped two sons of al-Qaeda militants and proceeded to drug them and blackmail them with sexually indecent photographs they took. The boys were pressured into installing monitoring devices in the homes of militants and eventually Egyptian agents allegedly arranged for one of the boys to assassinate Zawahiri with a suitcase bomb. Sudanese police uncovered the plot and the boys were arrested. According to several militants, the Sudanese released the boys into Zawahiri's custody for interrogation after he assured them they would not be harmed. Instead, Zawahiri reportedly tried them under Islamic law and had them executed. This incident is said not only to cause conflict with the Sudanese authorities, but also fellow militants.

In 1996-1997, Zawahiri traveled the world seeking refuge as he did not immediately follow Bin Laden to Afghanistan. The locations of his travels are not very well known, but it is believed he made his way throughout Europe. During a brief stay in the Netherlands, he presented a farfetched idea to establish an extremist alternative to the Al Jazeera satellite television network. He was arrested along with two cohorts upon entering the Russian Federation in the southern province of Dagestan illegally. His intention had been to establish a base in Chechnya. The Russians did not discover his true identity and after six months in prison he was released.

Prospects were not bright for the militant when he achieved his freedom. His personal health had suffered due from stress. His organization had been squashed in Egypt and Sudan. Several of its members were chastising their leader for taking excessive risks after his apprehension in Russia. He had run out of options and acceded to join Bin Laden in Afghanistan.

The alliance with al-Qaeda was limiting Zawahiri's strategic control over his own organization. He was forced to shift the target of EIJ away from the "near enemy", the Egyptian government, to the "far enemy", the United States. Bin Laden's insistence on the matter forced the EIJ leader's hand. Zawahiri justified naming the United States as a target by claiming conspiratorial Jewish control over the country. The matter was settled in **February 1998 when Zawahiri signed onto a Bin Laden letter calling for all Muslims to kill Americans whenever possible**. He met stiff resistance from within EIJ, and even lost the support of his brother Mohammed, who had been one of his closest allies for the entirety of his militant career. After American agents snatched several EIJ members in Azerbaijan and shut down a cell in Albania, **Zawahiri issued a statement promising revenge the day before the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa**. President Clinton ordered Operation Infinite Reach in the aftermath of the bombings, and Zawahiri responded with a blustery statement filled with anti-American rhetoric and threats.

Meanwhile, EIJ continued to wane as an organization. Many formerly hardcore members had lost enthusiasm for armed struggle and instead began to favor more peaceful initiatives for the furtherance of Islam in Egypt. Testimony in the trial of members of the Albanian cell indicated that there were only forty EIJ members left outside of Egypt. The financial dependence on Bin Laden's generosity also continued. The standard of living for members was quite low in Afghanistan and caused discontent among the ranks. Tired of criticism of his leadership stemming from all the above reasons, Zawahiri resigned in 1999. His resignation proved short-lived as there was no one to replace him and he returned to his position as emir of the group several months later. In June 2001, EIJ ceased to be an independent group and formally merged with al-Qaeda.

Zawahiri appears to have been active in operational planning within the al-Qaeda framework for several years before the official merger. Egyptians as a group have been very important within al-Qaeda as operation managers. According to American intelligence, **Zawahiri controlled the cell in Yemen which attacked the U.S.S. Cole in October 2001**. He is believed to have worked closely with Tawfiq bin Attash, a Saudi who is suspected of running the Cole operation **as well as being on the ground floor of the plan behind the September 11th attacks**. Information was coming to US authorities as they ratcheted up pressure on Zawahiri and his brothers. His brother Hussein was allegedly kidnapped in Malaysia, where he worked as an engineer, and flown to Egypt for interrogation.

One of the greatest fears of the US intelligence community was that al-Qaeda was trying to develop capabilities to carry out Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear warfare. Zawahiri appears to have been central to an effort to acquire chemical and biological weapons. An April 1999 memo suggests EIJ research the possibility of using non-conventional weapons. He plunged himself into research on the subject and worked closely with an Egyptian scientist Medhat Mursi al-Sayed to research weapons. Satellite imagery and a video acquired by CNN suggest that tests of nerve gas were carried out in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan.

Any such efforts were made secondary by preparation for the American response to 9/11. Zawahiri, along with others central to the al-Qaeda movement left Kandahar and headed for the mountains in Afghanistan. **It is suspected that Zawahiri's wife and children were possibly killed in a December strike on the cave complex were they were sheltered**. Zawahiri appeared on a video tape with Bin Laden claiming responsibility for the attacks. Also included in the tape is footage from the martyrdom video of one of the hijackers. Filming suicide bombers' statements before operations had been a major part of Zawahiri's efforts against Egypt while operating out of the Sudan in the 1990s. A body was tested for possibly being that of the militant, however upon comparing the skull of the corpse with that of Zawahiri's deceased brother Mohammed, the FBI determined it was not him.

As of February 2005, Zawahiri was still considered at large. It is unknown whether he survived US operations against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and if he did whether he remains active within the organization. In July 2003, reports surfaced that Iran was holding several high level al-Qaeda members, including Zawahiri, either as detainees or guests. These reports were never confirmed. The FBI is offering a reward of $25 million for information leading to his arrest for his connection to the embassy bombings.

On 21 February 2005, a videotape featuring Zawahiri was aired on satellite telelvision networkAl Jazeera. The tape featured typical themes for al-Qaeda, railing against US policy in the Islamic world. It is unknown when or where the tape was filmed.