B|B|C NEWS

Profile: Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan

Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, a top al-Qaeda suspect, has been on the FBI's wanted list for years.

He was killed in an attack by US forces in southern Somalia on 14 September, a US official says.

The 28-year-old Kenyan is wanted in connection with the 2002 attacks on a hotel and an Israeli airliner in his home city of Mombasa.

Some reports suggest he was also involved in the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in which more than 250 people died.

Nabhan was reportedly one of the original members of the al-Qaeda East Africa cell.

The BBC's Odhiambo Joseph in Mombasa says Nabhan grew up in the 1980s in Mombasa's Majengo slum, an area inhabited at the time by Swahili Arabs.

After dropping out of secondary school, he attended a local Koranic school, or madrasa, in Majengo.

Residents say he then went to work in the Middle East in the mid-1990s.

His mother Aisha Abdallah told the BBC he then returned home and was selling fruit juice and mobile phone accessories before he disappeared in 2002, leaving behind a nine-month-old daughter.

Shortly afterwards, his name became infamous - on the day of the Mombasa attacks.

> " **Nabhan was an important character but al-Shabab will be able to bring up other leaders to replace him or fill his shoes** "
> Andre le Sage African Centre, US National Defense University

He is believed to have owned the vehicle used in the attack on the Israeli-owned hotel near Mombasa that killed 15 people.

He is also wanted by the FBI in connection with a botched missile attack on an Israeli airliner in Mombasa on the same day.

Our reporter says many of his family - who were picked up and questioned after the attack - have moved from Mombasa further up the coast to Lamu Island and his ancestral home of Malindi.

According to Andre le Sage, from the African Centre at the National Defense University in Washington DC, Nabhan has probably been one of the individuals who has maintained overall operational command in East Africa with "possibly even connections to al-Qaeda senior leadership in the Pakistan-Afghanistan area".

"If he was removed from the East Africa al-Qaeda cell, it would certainly degrade the capabilities of that network and their ability to conduct future attacks," he told the BBC's Network Africa programme.

Police raid

A local Muslim leader told the BBC that since 2002, Nabhan has made several visits to Malindi.

He says he evaded capture in August last year, when Kenya police launched a raid in the coastal town for his associate Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the East Africa embassy bombings.

Mr Mohammed was reported to have gained entry to Kenya through Lamu Island, which borders Somalia.

Nabhan - alongside other al-Qaeda-linked foreign suspects like Mr Mohammed - has reportedly been hiding in Islamist-held areas of Somalia for some time.

He is said to have been killed in a helicopter raid by US special forces on the coastal town of Barawe, which is under the control of the Islamist group, al-Shabab.

Mr le Sage says Nabhan has been working closely with al-Shabab "in the management of training camps, particularly training camps where foreign fighters were receiving jihadist training".

But while he says his removal will have an impact on both al-Qaeda and al-Shabab, it will not have larger political implications in Somalia.

"Al-Shabab network is composed of many leaders and many individuals, Nabhan was an important character but al-Shabab will be able to bring up other leaders to replace him or fill his shoes."

Last year, one of al-Shabab's main leaders Aden Hashi Ayro, who reportedly trained in Afghanistan, was killed in a US air strike.

Since then analysts say the Islamists, boosted by foreign fighters, have gained ground in their fight against the UN-backed government.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/8256024.stm

Published: 2009/09/15 15:42:28 GMT

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BBC NEWS

Piracy symptom of bigger problem

By Roger Middleton

Searching for satellite images of the pirate village of Eyl in Somalia, you are confronted not with palaces and piles of arms but a few crumbling houses and rows of battered boats along the beach.

Even here, where pirate millions first reach Somalia, desperate poverty is everywhere and insecurity is the norm.

US President Barack Obama has said that Somali piracy must be brought under control. But the world's attention is for the most part fixed on the ocean, while the real challenges lie ashore.

What we are seeing in the Gulf of Aden and western Indian Ocean is just the visible tip of a complex web of challenges inside Somalia, a web that reaches across the country, the region and the world.

Somalia is one of the poorest, most violent, least stable countries anywhere on Earth.

It suffers from severe drought and its people face hunger and violence on a daily basis. This is not a new situation, Somalia, especially the south, has been in this state for many years.

> " **The risks associated with piracy can be seen as little worse than those faced every day** "

What is new is that the world is now once again concerned with the goings on of this collapsed state.

Somalis have learnt to live in circumstances under which many might be expected to give up.

In the face of overwhelming adversity they have created thriving businesses, operating entirely in the informal sector, and hospitals built and maintained with money sent home by the diaspora.

However, people who have been forgotten by the world and who hear of toxic waste being dumped on their beaches and foreigners stealing their fish have difficulty being concerned when representatives of that world are held to ransom.

And for many who have grown up surrounded by constant insecurity and bloodshed, violence and the risk of death are unexceptional hazards.

For this reason the current attempts to fight piracy from the sea are only dealing with symptoms. They do not address the reasons why young men are prepared to risk their lives chasing ships around the ocean.

Deadly country

Piracy is in essence a law and order issue, and in Somalia there is virtually no authority to carry out the kind of policing that could effectively disrupt pirate operations.

What government there is in Somalia has bigger problems.

The ongoing battle with the hard line Al Shabaab militia that controls Kismaayo and the deep south threatens not just the security of the state but has made Mogadishu one of the deadliest places on earth.

President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad heads a fairly broad coalition but his opponents have men, weapons and money and are in a fierce struggle to gain control of the country.

When the internationally recognised government is fighting for control of its own capital city, combating pirates must seem a somewhat lower priority.

Even in the semi-autonomous region of Puntland in the north east, from where most pirate attacks are

launched, the local government is contending with massive problems.

Boats laden with desperate refugees fleeing the war in Somalia leave almost daily, heading towards Yemen.

The smugglers often dump their human cargoes in the sea to avoid capture and leave them to drown.

Even for those who make it to the other side, life as second class citizens in already poor Yemen is dire.

No engagement

Somalia has spent almost 20 years in a state of civil war, and shifting alliances, international interventions and a steady supply of unemployed young men and cheap guns have acted against any tendencies towards stabilisation.

In a country where the average income is estimated at around $650 (£435) - Somalia is too anarchic for accurate statistics - the lure of up to $10,000 for a successful pirate raid is obvious.

The chronic instability of most of the country and the attendant daily threats to life mean that the risks associated with piracy can be seen as little worse than those faced every day.

Pirate bosses have little difficulty recruiting to fill any gaps in their crews. In this context a solution based on security systems and guns will not address the root causes of Somali piracy.

There are ways that navies from around the world can plaster over the problems of Somalia but as long as a state with grinding poverty, hunger, no law enforcement and no effective government sits beside a rich trading route, piracy will continue.

The outside world has for too long seen Somalia only in terms of threats to their own security.

Targeted missiles and interventions have been used to remove threatening individuals or groups but there has been no serious engagement with the political and developmental problems that allow those threats to take root.

If there is a silver lining to the piracy issue it may be that a deeper, broader and more imaginative engagement with Somalia develops.

Piracy is difficult for the nations of the world and disastrous for sailors - but for millions of Somalis the problems of their homeland are catastrophic.

Roger Middleton is coordinating a new project at the think-tank Chatham House investigating the economic dimensions of conflict in the Horn of Africa.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/8001183.stm

Published: 2009/04/15 21:50:04 GMT

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B B C NEWS

Tricky dealings in hostage case

By Aidan Lewis
BBC News

More than a month after their disappearance, the fate of two Austrian hostages who were captured while touring the Tunisian desert remains shrouded in uncertainty.

But the case has been seen to expose the difficulty of controlling the vast expanses of the Sahara as al-Qaeda's North Africa affiliate seeks to make its presence felt across the Maghreb.

The group, which was blamed for a number of spectacular suicide bombings in Algeria last year, has raised its profile once more after claiming the kidnapping.

It is now thought to be holding Wolfgang Ebner, 51, and Andrea Kloiber, 43, at an undisclosed location in northern Mali.

According to statements posted on the internet, the kidnappers have demanded that militants held in Algeria and Tunisia be freed in return for the release of the Austrians.

They have twice deferred a deadline, stating most recently that their request must be met by 6 April.

There have been unconfirmed reports that the group is also asking for a ransom.

Seeking headlines

The al-Qaeda Organisation in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) emerged from the remnants of the Islamist insurgency that began in Algeria in the 1990s.

It adopted its current name early last year as - after years of being worn down by the Algerian security forces - it began to scale up bombings and increase its flow of propaganda.

But recent attacks had been largely restricted to northern Algeria.

Jean-Francois Daguzin, a senior research fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris, said that last month's kidnapping showed the group was trying to spread its influence, drawing together smaller militant factions from across the region.

"The desire is to create an insurrectional space, and to attract attention by targeting foreigners," he said.

The case of the Austrians is not without precedent.

Between February and May 2003, a group of militants from the Salafist Group for Call and Combat - AQIM's precursor - captured 32 European tourists travelling across the Sahara and held them for several months.

One of the hostages is reported to have died of heat exhaustion, before the militants released the last of the tourists in August of that year after reportedly receiving a ransom of 5m euros from the German government.

German officials refused to confirm or deny the reports.

That incident focused attention on the security threat in the Sahara, and prompted efforts to tighten controls.

The US government had identified the Sahel area, which borders the Sahara desert and including Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania as a potential terrorist haven, setting up the Pan-Sahel Initiative as a counter measure.

This developed into the expanded Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative, which also covers Algeria,

Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal and Ghana.

The programme is "designed to help develop the internal security forces necessary to control borders and combat terrorism and other illegal activity," according to the US military.

Difficult terrain

Although some observers have questioned how great the radical threat in the region really is, the disappearance of the Austrian tourists appears to show that there are still gaps along the porous desert borders.

"The Sahara is a dangerous place if only because various groups recognise that the states don't exercise a monopoly on power," said Geoff Porter, an analyst for the Eurasia Group in New York

"They can't, they don't have the capacity."

But he said that there were still questions about how the kidnappers had transported the Austrians across hundreds of kilometres of desert, some of which are militarised, and it was possible that regional governments had facilitated the transfer of the hostages to neutral ground.

The Austrian authorities say they are still not clear about exactly where the two tourists, who last contacted their relatives on 18 February, had disappeared.

Once it was reported that they were being held in Mali, they dispatched a team of emissaries to the capital, Bamako, where there is no Austrian embassy.

Austria's government has been seeking help as it tries to get to handle a complex case in unfamiliar terrain.

"We established contacts with governments, NGOs, individuals, and people who are knowledgeable about the area," said Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, a spokesman for the Austrian foreign ministry.

"It's really a major effort involving all sorts of parties in the region and beyond."

There have been unconfirmed reports that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, is one of those involved in negotiations.

Targeting tourists

Last week there was also an outbreak of violence in northern Mali as Tuareg rebels, who are seeking more autonomy and a greater share of resources across the region, attacked a Malian army convoy.

Austrian authorities say they have no indication that the unrest has affected the kidnap case, but they are following the situation closely.

In one of their statements, the kidnappers warned Western tourists not to visit Tunisia and other North African countries, including Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania.

A photograph released in conjunction with the statement shows a woman - said to be Ms Kloiber - wearing a blue headscarf with her face digitally obscured.

This may be because showing a woman's face is prohibited under radical Islamist beliefs.

The case is particularly worrying for Tunisia, which has a thriving tourist industry.

Apart from a suicide attack in 2002 on the island of Djerba, the country has been largely successful in keeping a lid on Islamic extremism.

Austria has raised its travel warning for the south of Tunisia, though the foreign ministry noted that most tourism is directed to the Mediterranean coast in the north.

"Tunisia has always been the safest country in the Maghreb," said Mr Daguzin.

"This shows that despite all their efforts to show that there is complete security, AQIM is able to strike wherever it wants."