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## Parcel bombs point to al-Qaeda switch

By Syed Saleem Shahzad  
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ISLAMABAD - The foiled al-Qaeda plot to blow up two cargo planes indicates that the group's international operations, now under the stewardship of Egyptian Saiful Adil (Saif al-Adel), will focus on relatively low-intensity terror attacks around the world rather than on big missions such as the September 11, 2001, assault on New York and Washington.

Two United States-bound bombs sent in air cargo from Yemen were intercepted in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and in Britain. The devices were discovered on Friday hidden in printers. Such an idea bears the hallmark of Adil, who was earlier this year released from Iranian custody after disappearing following the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in late 2001.

Asia Times Online reportedly exclusively how al-Qaeda's military chief was freed with about 15 other al-Qaeda members in a deal that saw Heshmatollah Attarzadeh, the commercial attache at the Iranian consulate in Peshawar, Pakistan, released by militants. (See [How Iran and al-Qaeda made a deal](#) Asia Times Online, April 30, 2010.) Those freed included Saad bin Laden (one of Osama bin Laden's sons), Suleman al-Gaith and Abu Hafs al-Mauritani.

Asia Times Online also recently broke news of Adil and other top al-Qaeda members living in Pakistan's North Waziristan tribal area on the border with Afghanistan. (See [Taliban peace talks come to a halt](#) October 30, 2010.) "Saiful Adil is likely to be the new face of al-Qaeda in 2011, with operations emanating in Pakistan and spreading to Somalia, Yemen and Turkey to pitch operations in Europe and India," the article

reported.

Adil's return to al-Qaeda's command will reverse the strategies of the late 1990s, devised by Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the mastermind of September 11, militant contacts tell Asia Times Online. Khalid was known for his big-ticket ideas without thought for the consequences, while Adil is known to have a much more nuanced approach that takes into account the bigger picture.

### **Big picture, small operations**

The parcel bomb plot understandably raised alarm in capitals across the world. Various analysts gave their take on the incident, with some placing emphasis Saudi Arabia, following a report quoting a US official that Saudi bomb-maker Ibrahim Hassan al-Asiri, believed to be working with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, was a key suspect.

A report on Monday said that US officials had intercepted parcels from Yemen bound for Chicago in mid-September, which they believed was a "dry run" to test timings for the package bomb plot foiled last week. Those shipments contained household goods including books, religious literature and a computer disk, but no explosives.

A US official was reported as saying that the packages were shipped by "someone with ties to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula", referring to the Yemen-based offshoot of al-Qaeda that Britain and the US have accused of being behind last week's plot.

Even before September 11, Adil believed in smaller attacks that would damage American interests but which would not necessarily result in an overwhelming reaction, as happened after the September 11 attacks when Afghanistan was invaded and the Taliban driven out for harboring al-Qaeda; and then Iraq occupied in 2003.

This became a main disagreement between Khalid and Adil, who argued that while the September 11 attacks were meticulously planned and carried out, they led to the ouster of the Taliban government and the death of thousands of dedicated Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.

The subsequent "war on terror" resulted in more than 700 al-Qaeda members being arrested in Pakistan and taken to the US detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and also led to the ongoing US drone war that has killed scores of al-Qaeda members in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas.

Adil believed that September 11 overall caused more damage to al-Qaeda than benefit. He wanted a calculated war against America in which the response would be sustainable for al-Qaeda.

Adil had been involved in several high-profile terror operations since the 1980s in Egypt. His footprints were found in the bombing of two American embassies in Africa in 1998, besides many other attacks. In all these instances, the US response was muted - a few

missiles were launched at Afghanistan in 1998 and a special Central Intelligence Agency unit was set up to catch bin Laden.

Adil is committed to boosting recruitment and the promotion of an ideology that will stimulate al-Qaeda-led anti-Western resistance in occupied Muslim territories and other countries. This will be done with low-intensity attacks that support resistance movements rather than lead to their obliteration.

The drive is supported by Pakistani Ilyas Kashmiri and his 313 Brigade, the field operational arm of al-Qaeda operating out of North Waziristan.

At the time of Adil's release, a senior Pakistani counter-terrorism official told Asia Times Online, "If Saiful Adil has been exchanged, Pakistan is not aware of this, but it would be bad news for the Western world as it would mean a revival in al-Qaeda's international operations."

His prediction appears to be spot on.