

Another Holy War, Waged on American Soil

Al-Fuqra: A Muslim sect with a dangerous agenda

MUSLIMS ARE NOT TERRORISTS!" shouts the headline in a January 1992 edition of Insight, the newspaper published by a group called Muslims of the Americas from its remote encampment in upstate New York. But the accompanying article adds a menacing caveat. "Simply said, a Muslim must fight in defense of Al-Islam, his life and property against the oppressor or transgressor . . . Remember, 'Tumult and Oppression are worse than slaughter.'"

Federal investigators know Muslims of the Americas by another name: "Al-Fuqra," Arabic for "the impoverished." Once written off as an inconsequential splinter group, Al-Fuqra is now considered perhaps the most dangerous fundamentalist sect operating in the United States. Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, alleged to be the spiritual inspiration for the World Trade Center bombing, may be the most notorious Islamic cleric on American soil. But Al-Fuqra and its Pakistani founder, Sheik Mubarak Shah Jilani, have perpetrated far more havoc. Law-enforcement officials say they are responsible for a decade-long string of assassinations and bombings in the name of Islamic purity.

Enemies list: Al-Fuqra's actual agenda is murky. Jilani and his estimated 3,000 U.S. followers—mostly African-American Muslims—profess a lengthy and wide-ranging list of enemies. The roster of transgressors includes Hindus and Hare Krishnas, Israel, the Jewish Defense League and even the Nation of Islam. The sect emerged in the early 1980s, as Jilani built a following in a Brooklyn mosque, mixing charismatic fundamentalism with calls for young men to join Afghan guerrillas in their fight against the Soviet Union. But investigators say Jilani's disciples also waged holy war on American soil. An alleged Al-Fuqra leader, Stephen Paster, blew off most of one hand preparing explosives

for the July 1983 firebombing of a Portland, Ore., hotel owned by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the late Indian guru. He served four years in prison for the attack. Later that summer the leader of a small Detroit Muslim sect was shot to death. Authorities say his assailants were Al-Fuqra members who died in a subsequent firebombing of the sect's headquarters.

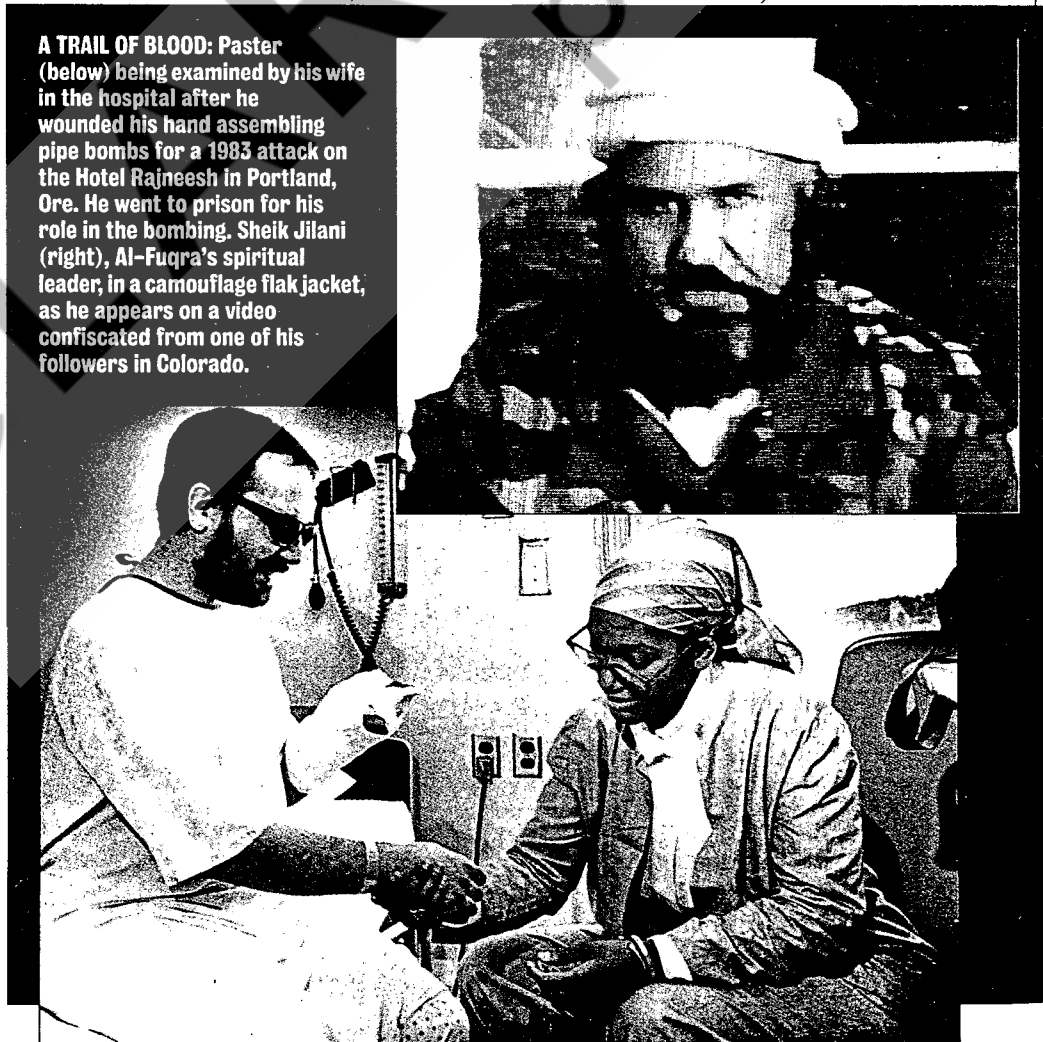
The group's violent past spilled into full view when Colorado Springs police raided a storage locker in 1989. They found a cache of firearms, grenades, plastic explosives and target-practice silhouettes labeled ZIONIST PIG and FBI ANTI-TERRORIST TEAM. Investigators also recovered Al-Fuqra documents linking the group to a

pattern of mayhem, including the 1984 firebombings of Hare Krishna temples in Philadelphia and Denver and plans for the murder of Imam Rashid Khalifa, a Tucson, Ariz., cleric who preached that the Koran was written by man, not Allah. One handwritten passage advises that Khalifa be executed "in the quietest method feasible: knife, garrote . . ." to ward off police. The notes add that anyone who happened onto the crime scene before Khalifa arrived would meet the same fate. "As we wait, everyone who comes must be eliminated . . ." Khalifa was warned, but was stabbed to death four months later as prescribed in the documents. Last October a Colorado Springs jury convicted James Williams, a sect member, of conspiracy in the murder.

Canadian authorities began to take Al-Fuqra seriously in 1991, when five alleged followers were arrested on charges of conspiring to blow up a Toronto Indian theater and Hindu temple. Evidence in the 1993 trial included a video entitled "Soldier of Allah." It features Sheik Jilani exhorting oppressed Muslims around the world to defend themselves. Three of the defendants, convicted of conspiracy to endanger

COLORADO DEPT. OF LABOR & EMPLOYMENT, INVESTIGATIONS AND CRIMINAL ENFORCEMENT SECTION, KRAIG SCATTARELLA—OREGONIAN

A TRAIL OF BLOOD: Paster (below) being examined by his wife in the hospital after he wounded his hand assembling pipe bombs for a 1983 attack on the Hotel Rajneesh in Portland, Ore. He went to prison for his role in the bombing. Sheik Jilani (right), Al-Fuqra's spiritual leader, in a camouflage flak jacket, as he appears on a video confiscated from one of his followers in Colorado.



life, denied any link to the sect. But Jilani told a journalist at a radical Islamic summit in Khartoum last year that one of the convicted defendants and two who were acquitted had studied with him in Pakistan.

Investigators have also linked Clement Rodney Hampton-El, a Brooklyn man named in news reports as an Al-Fuqra member, to last year's World Trade Center bombing conspiracy. They say he bragged to a federal informant about testing dynamite used in the blast. Hampton-El, an Afghan-war veteran, was never charged in the case, and his lawyer says he has no relationship with Al-Fuqra. Last June he was one of eight suspects arrested in an alleged terrorist plot to destroy other New York sites.

Jilani disavows any connection to the violence and denies the existence of any group called Al-Fuqra. He says he is a scholar who tries to instill Islamic discipline in the young men who enroll in the branches of his Koranic Open University in Lahore, Pakistan; upstate New York, and at least three other sites in the United States. "Once they join our university, they become real good citizens," he told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation earlier this month. "They stop smoking; they stop stealing; they stop living on welfare. This is what I teach them."

Clandestine warriors: But intelligence sources say Sheik Jilani's mentoring of young Muslims includes terrorist training. In 1992 the CIA began receiving reports that he had established a camp for Islamic militants in Sudan, now controlled by a radical Muslim regime. The agency also established that Jilani was well connected inside ISI, Pakistan's intelligence service. U.S. analysts suspect that Pakistan was using the sheik's recruits as clandestine warriors in terrorist actions against Indian targets. Shortly before leaving office, the Bush administration warned the Pakistani government that it would be listed as a terrorist-sponsor state unless it purged ISI. Sources say that Jilani's inside connections were dismissed as a result.

Al-Fuqra's targets to date have been confined largely to rival religious factions. But terrorism analysts say their zeal poses a wider threat to the public safety. The end of the cold war, and the resulting surge in nationalist violence overseas, has emboldened groups like Al-Fuqra. Are they a general danger? "Yes, to the extent that they're violent and that they're fanatics," says David Long, a former State Department counterterrorism expert. At Muslims of the Americas headquarters in Hancock, N.Y., a man named Mr. Haqq who answered the phone said only that the police and press have routinely distorted the group's views. But Haqq's protests are belied by a lengthening trail of blood.

MARK HOSENBALL in Washington



STEPHEN JAFFE - REUTER

Changing of the guard: Admiral Kelso last week, announcing his early retirement

Tailhook's 'Lightning Rod'

Navy: Kelso clears his name, and Coughlin resigns

TAINTED BY THE TAILHOOK SCANDAL, the navy's top admiral, Frank B. Kelso II, will retire two months early. Lt. Paula Coughlin, the first to go public with charges of sexual assault, will retire at least 10 years early. Kelso leaves with a flowery note from Defense Secretary William Perry praising him "as a man of the highest honor and integrity." Coughlin leaves with a stack of hate mail.

It was navy-style justice. More than two years after Coughlin and about 80 other women were sexually assaulted by drunken navy and Marine Corps aviators at the Las Vegas Tailhook convention, not a single officer has been court-martialed, though 140 were implicated in the scandal. After a navy judge dismissed three of the four remaining Tailhook cases and accused Kelso of trying to cover up his involvement in the scandal, the 60-year-old chief of naval operations announced last week that he would take early retirement.

But first Kelso insisted that Perry exonerate him—and produced affidavits from senior Pentagon officials declaring there was no evidence he witnessed any lewd behavior. "I clearly have become the lightning rod for Tailhook," complained the admiral. "It won't go away." He's probably right about that. The House Armed Services Committee plans hearings on Tailhook next month, and Kelso will likely be summoned as a witness.

Meanwhile, ever since Coughlin's revelations, she has been the target of unrelenting rumormongering by officers trying to impugn her credibility. Aviators peddle

stories that she's a malcontent and temptress who willingly had her legs shaved by pilots during the convention. An underground newsletter has even sprung up, titled the Gauntlet, which circulates among fliers and ridicules Coughlin for being a party girl. She denies it all, and the rumors have never checked out. But Coughlin has submitted her resignation letter. "It's absolutely horrible, the whispering campaign out there," says a navy commander. "I'm surprised she was able to gut it out as long as she did."

It is true that Tailhook has changed the navy. Eighty officers, including 30 admirals, received administrative discipline that will likely kill their chances for promotion. Kelso ordered that navy men receive sexual-harassment sensitivity training each year. Those found guilty of harassment will be discharged immediately. Under pressure from Congress, the navy will now allow women to serve in most of its combat units. A new generation of admirals will soon be taking over. The leading contender for Kelso's job is Adm. Jeremy Boorda, 55, who is coordinating NATO's military-response possibilities in Bosnia. As the navy's personnel chief during the Las Vegas Tailhook convention, Boorda badgered fellow admirals to take Coughlin's charges seriously, then had her transferred temporarily to his office to protect her from retaliation. "We're simply not going to tolerate that kind of behavior anymore," promises one young admiral. But it will be some time before everyone in the navy complies.

DOUGLAS WALLER