

Investigating the Attack

Teams from the FBI, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the CIA were immediately sent to Yemen to investigate the attack. With difficulty, Barbara Bodine, the U.S. ambassador to Yemen, tried to persuade the Yemeni government to accept these visitors and allow them to carry arms, though the Yemenis balked at letting Americans openly carry long guns (rifles, shotguns, automatic weapons). Meanwhile, Bodine and the leader of the FBI team, John O'Neill, clashed repeatedly—to the point that after O'Neill had been rotated out of Yemen but wanted to return, Bodine refused the request. Despite the initial tension, the Yemeni and American investigations proceeded. Within a few weeks, the outline of the story began to emerge.¹²⁸

On the day of the *Cole* attack, a list of suspects was assembled that included al Qaeda's affiliate Egyptian Islamic Jihad. U.S. counterterrorism officials told us they immediately assumed that al Qaeda was responsible. But as Deputy DCI John McLaughlin explained to us, it was not enough for the attack to smell, look, and taste like an al Qaeda operation. To make a case, the CIA needed not just a guess but a link to someone known to be an al Qaeda operative.¹²⁹

Within the first weeks after the attack, the Yemenis found and arrested both Badawi and Quso, but did not let the FBI team participate in the interrogations. The CIA described initial Yemeni support after the *Cole* as "slow and inadequate." President Clinton, Secretary Albright, and DCI Tenet all intervened to help. Because the information was secondhand, the U.S. team could not make its own assessment of its reliability.¹³⁰

On November 11, the Yemenis provided the FBI with new information from the interrogations of Badawi and Quso, including descriptions of individuals from whom the detainees had received operational direction. One of them was Khallad, who was described as having lost his leg. The detainees said that Khallad helped direct the *Cole* operation from Afghanistan or Pakistan. The Yemenis (correctly) judged that the man described as Khallad was Tawfiq bin Attash.¹³¹

An FBI special agent recognized the name Khallad and connected this news with information from an important al Qaeda source who had been meeting regularly with CIA and FBI officers. The source had called Khallad Bin Ladin's "run boy," and described him as having lost one leg in an explosives accident at a training camp a few years earlier. To confirm the identification, the FBI agent asked the Yemenis for their photo of Khallad. The Yemenis provided the photo on November 22, reaffirming their view that Khallad had been an intermediary between the plotters and Bin Ladin. (In a meeting with U.S. officials a few weeks later, on December 16, the source identified Khallad from the Yemeni photograph.)¹³²

U.S. intelligence agencies had already connected Khallad to al Qaeda terrorist operations, including the 1998 embassy bombings. By this time the Yemenis