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Author: Sayf al-Islam

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Title: The Ogaden File: Operation Holding (Al-Msk)

Synopsis

What is apparently a personal narrative by Sayf al-Islam that describes how Abu Hafs of al-Qa'ida sent him and a team of al-Qa'ida operatives to Somalia and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia to construct training camps, train members of the General Islamic Union in military tactics and ideology, and to assist them in fighting the enemy.

Key Themes

Going to Ogaden

Abu Hafs sent a team of al-Qa'ida operatives in January 1993 from Peshawar, Afghanistan to Nairobi, Kenya to train the General Islamic Union in Somalia and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, which had been promised by Abu Ubaydah, who was based in Kenya.

Prior to departure, the al-Qa'ida operatives received training in ideology and travel procedures. They wore European clothes, and traveled in groups of two or three, always with one person in the group who spoke English. The operatives had a three-fold mission:

1. To find and establish a new base for military operations.
2. To find a base area that was as close to the 'Arab region' as possible.
3. To train Somalian and Ogaden jihad forces.

Upon arrival in Nairobi, Sayf al-Islam and the other operatives met with Abu Ubaydah, and the Green Team agreed to go to Ogaden, partly in order to honor the agreement between Abu Ubaydah and the General Islamic Union. Sayf al-Islam had doubts about the feasibility of Ogaden due to its isolation and rough terrain. In Nairobi, the Green Team wrote a plan to train supported guerrilla platoons.

The Green Team traveled to Ogaden by hiring a small private plane from Kenya that landed at the village of Luuq in Somalia, where they were met by representatives of the General Islamic Union, and transported by armed convoy to the camp in Ogaden.

Sayf al-Islam provides a detailed topographical and ethnographic description of the region, probably in part to fulfill the first mandate for the al-Qa'ida mission.

In Ogaden

In Ogaden, the Green Team found that the camp of the local General Islamic Union branch, headed by Abd al-Salam Uthman, was primitive, unprotected, and strategically poorly placed. After meeting with a second group, headed by Abdullah Mohammed Ira, they eventually built a new camp, protected by two perimeters, on a nearby mountain. In describing the site selection and camp construction process, the author is keenly aware of the strategic importance of topography and natural resources, and describes the layout of the camp and its location in some detail.

Apparently another file describes the training program in detail, but in this document, Sayf al-Islam summarizes a three-step training program. While Sayf al-Islam was in Ogaden, the camp graduated two full classes, totaling approximately 460 recruits.

1. Use of different types of weapons, discipline, adapting to military life (5 weeks).
2. Specialist training in various units (recon, command, administration, combat) (2-3 weeks)
3. Recruits grouped into supported guerrilla platoons (2-3 weeks)

Between the second and third phases, Abu Hafs came to the region from Pakistan to discuss al-Qa'ida help with the revolutionary council (of the General Islamic Union). Although they were not able to agree on aid to the Somalis, Sayf al-Islam was appointed al-Qa'ida's representative to the General Islamic Union.

Sayf al-Islam was soon forced to deal with a planned separation of the Ogaden branch of the General Islamic Union from the main Somali organization, on the grounds that the main organization had abandoned jihad, and refused monetary and military support to the Ogaden branch. Sayf al-Islam managed to convince the Ogaden branch to stay, in part due to dangling the presence of al-Qa'ida in Somalia. However, Abd al-Salam Uthman went abroad, despite Sayf al-Islam's advice against it (as the timing was not right), to rally support unsuccessfully for the Ogaden branch's jihad.

Sayf al-Islam continued the training program despite an attack from the enemy in August, which was successfully repulsed. The author also describes dealing with an incident where members of the General Islamic Union requisitioned a car from a group of Sufis, and as a result caused a rift between Sufis, and Salafists in the region. Sayf al-Islam was worried that this split would open up a second front, and mediated a face-saving end to the conflict.

Sayf al-Islam also describes the battle of Da'rduur in September 1993, where the mujahideen use their new training to stop the enemy's advance, and push them back. After the recruits' graduation, as military advisor, Sayf al-Islam organized a series of meetings among the Ogaden commanders where they created an operational plan to take advantage of their new training, and advance against the enemy. As a result, the Ogaden jihadists successfully began advancing in October 1993, and Sayf al-Islam returned to Beled Huwa' to meet with Abu Fatima. He suggests learning from the experiences of the battles, forming leadership, and investigating how to shape and liberate the region.

On several occasions, Sayf al-Islam mentions hearing news of events outside of the region, including the killing of 18 US soldiers in Somalia and the attack on the Russian Parliament, the Oslo Accords, and a referendum in Egypt.