

the most wanted woman in the world

How did a Boston-educated scientist and mother of three end up on the FBI's list of possible top al-Qaeda terrorists? And after she disappeared in Pakistan in 2003, where did she go? Deborah Scroggins follows her trail.

RED ALERT
AAFIA SIDDIQUI
IN HER FBI MUG
SHOT. IS SHE
THE MATA HARI
OF AL-QAEDA?

Aafia Siddiqui, a 33-year-old Boston neuroscientist and the mother of three young children, became the most wanted woman in the world on May 26, 2004. That was the day U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft strode onto a Washington podium lined with gigantic black-and-white mug shots of Aafia and six Muslim men. Standing there, Ashcroft grimly warned the American people that every one of the individuals pictured could be involved in a plot to "hit the United States." "They're all sought in connection with terrorist threats against the United States," he intoned in typically sonorous fashion. "They all pose a clear and present danger to the U.S. They all should be considered armed and dangerous." With black hair severely pulled back and her mouth set in an uncompromising line, the diminutive Aafia looked at least as menacing in her FBI photo as the others, and U.S. officials soon were saying privately that the only woman officially named as an al-Qaeda operative might well be the most threatening of them all.

I'd first heard of Aafia more than a year earlier, around the time she suddenly vanished along with her children from her hometown of Karachi. That was when Washington started issuing warnings, often mentioning her by name, about the possibility that al-Qaeda might start using women in its attacks and that those attacks might involve chemical weapons or even a dirty bomb. With degrees from Brandeis University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she was said to be one of the few alleged al-Qaeda associates with the ability to move about the United States undetected and the scientific expertise to carry out a sophisticated attack. U.S. officials said she and her ex-husband, a former anesthesiologist at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital, had made suspicious money transfers and purchases of military equipment on the Internet. More ominously, they claimed that she had helped the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, with a plot to blow up underground gas tanks around Baltimore.

Aafia's friends and relatives vehemently disputed everything about the FBI's picture of her, including the

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photo itself, which they said was a composite drawn up from her Massachusetts driver's license to make her look as if she were a terrorist. "It just seems so unlikely," said Salma Kazmi, a Boston resident who knew Aafia from her student days. "I mean, she was just a mom!" In Boston, her family enlisted Elaine Whitfield Sharp, who first gained national fame as the attorney who defended British nanny Louise

Woodward against charges of accidentally killing a baby in her care, to stress that Aafia had not been charged with any crime and was only wanted by the FBI for questioning. Sharp said Aafia's ex-husband had beaten her and their children and might have had a hand in their disappearance. She added that the Siddiqui family had not seen Aafia since she got into a minicab in March 2003 accompanied by her six-year-old son, three-year-old daughter, and six-month-old baby boy, and were desperately worried about all four of them.

Then, some ten weeks after Sharp's press conference, came another thunderclap. Witnesses at a United Nations war-crimes-tribunal meeting in the African nation of Sierra Leone identified Aafia Siddiqui as the woman who had visited Liberia in the months before the 9/11 attacks to oversee a \$19 million diamond deal on behalf of al-Qaeda. Aafia Siddiqui, the witnesses seemed to be saying, wasn't just an "operator and facilitator"—she was the Mata Hari of al-Qaeda.

In fact, as I discovered on a search that took me from the teeming cities of Pakistan to the chilly banks of Boston's Charles River, the truth about Aafia Siddiqui may be both more ordinary and more frightening than has been previously reported. Hers is the story of an idealistic young woman who made the journey from Muslim student activism to possibly helping al-Qaeda terrorists bent on global jihad. But for the fact that she's a woman, her profile is not so different from that of others who have been drawn into al-Qaeda's web. Like many of them, she's a well-bred, computer-savvy professional educated in the West. As General Hamid Gul, the former head of Pakistan's intelligence agency, put it, "These are not riffraff—these are the cream of society." Her story sheds light on what psychiatrist and former CIA analyst Marc Sageman calls "the neglected role of women" in motivating men to fight for radical Islamic causes. And the mystery of her disappearance offers a peek into a secret war against terror that both U.S. and Pakistani officials would prefer to keep in the shadows.

Aafia Siddiqui was born in 1972, the youngest of three children, to Mohammed Siddiqui, a physician, and his wife, Ismat, an Islamic teacher and charity volunteer. After training in Britain, Siddiqui brought his family back to Karachi, a once-sleepy fishing village that has grown into a sweltering megalopolis of 14 million. They settled into a large, white, bougainvillea-draped bungalow in the exclusive "E" section of the Gulshan-e-Iqbal neighborhood. By all accounts, Aafia's was a happy childhood, filled with pets and dolls. Her sister, Fowzia, says she was an obedient little girl, eager to please because "she could not bear being yelled at."

The Siddiquis were pious Muslims who combined devotion to Islam with a determination to master Western science and tech-

nology. They looked forward to the day when the Muslim umma, or community of believers, would be reunited under a truly Islamic government. Aafia's forceful and energetic mother, in particular, believed that centuries of colonialism had degraded the position of women in Islam. She urged Muslim women to claim the rights given them in the Quran to education and to control their own money. She taught her daughters to memorize the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed so that they could support any assertion with the quotations to show that it was Islamically correct.

In 1977, the Siddiquis' hopes got a boost when General Zia ul-Haq, a committed Islamist and a friend of the family, seized power in a coup. (He held it until his death in a plane crash in 1988.) Intent on turning Pakistan into a truly Islamic state, Zia set up a new court system to enforce sharia, or Islamic law. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan's powerful intelligence agency, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), worked closely with the country's religious parties, the United States, and

Saudi Arabia to organize a covert Afghan resistance movement based on religious opposition to Communism. He established hundreds of hard-line Islamic schools, or madrassas, including some in Aafia's neighborhood. As a mark of special favor, he appointed Aafia's mother, Ismat, to a council set up to oversee two special Islamic taxes meant to be distributed to the poor.

Zia's son, Ijaz ul-Haq, is now President Pervez Musharraf's cabinet minister for religious affairs. At a meeting in his office decorated with plastic roses and photographs of his meetings with Saudi and Iranian leaders, Ijaz told me that his whole family respected Aafia's mother, Ismat, because she "is a religious scholar." Ijaz himself personifies the dualism so typical of Pakistan's upper-class Islamists, in which affection for the West coexists with a raging sense of injustice toward it. Square-jawed and clean-shaven, he looks and sounds like the captain of an American football team, and he fondly recalled his son's college years at Boston University. (Either Aafia or her sister Fowzia—he couldn't remember which—occasionally made his son home-cooked meals there.) Talking to him, I could never have guessed that a few months earlier, this smooth and Westernized cabinet member, this fan of Boston, became so overcome with jihadist enthusiasm at a party celebrating a pro-Taliban cleric's book launch that he offered himself, presumably rhetorically, as a prospective suicide bomber.

All three of the Siddiqui children were gifted students, and their parents encouraged them to complete their educations in the United States. Aafia's brother, Muhammad, led the way, becoming an architect in Houston. Her sister, Fowzia, a neurologist, graduated from Harvard Medical School. Aafia arrived in 1990. After a year at the University of Houston, she won a full scholarship to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "We all thought it was an honor and she deserved it," her sister recalled. In Cambridge, Aafia seemed to blossom. Her mother's daughter, she naturally gravitated toward volunteer work. In 1993, she

MODEL STUDENT

A GIFTED SCIENTIST, AAFIA GRADUATED IN BIOLOGY FROM MIT IN 1995 (RIGHT) AND WAS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL'S MUSLIM STUDENT ASSOCIATION.



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and orphans. "Please keep up the spirit and motivate others as well!!!!!! The Muslims of our umma need ALL the help we can provide them. Humbly, your sister, aafia."

In her signed E-mails, Aafia never mentions violence. Unlike the anonymous writers of *Al-Hussum*, she does not remind readers of the so-called beheading verse in the Quran urging believers fighting with unbelievers to "smite at their necks." But like them, she clearly takes the Quran literally. In a 1992 guide she wrote for the national MSA about how to establish a "daw'ah" table to attract non-Muslims to the faith, she talks about the danger of succumbing to Western pressure to "water down" Islam to make it fit a Western perspective. "This is especially the case with topics like jihad and women in Islam," she wrote. "Surely we don't want our reward of doing daw'ah to be transformed into punishment for speaking about Allah without knowledge, or attempting to change His religion."

Kohlmann says that al-Kifah at this time were openly distributing videos showing the mujahideen beheading Serb prisoners. In an E-mail, Aafia offers to show a video about Bosnia produced by another al-Qaeda-affiliated charity, the now-banned Mercy International, at the meetings of a Karachi charity her mother established. Kohlmann says that by 1993, anyone with Aafia's exposure to al-Kifah had to know that the group saw the United States as their ultimate enemy and were prepared to kill American civilians to achieve their goals. "Everyone at that level knew what they were doing," he said. Kohlmann's views are hard to square with the sentimental poem Aafia's family say she wrote home about how much she loved Boston and America. Perhaps she rationalized the dichotomy by looking forward to the day when the U.S. would convert to Islam. In her guide for the MSA, she asks for the strength and sincerity "that our humble effort continues, and expands . . . and more and more people come to the [religion] of Allah until America becomes a Muslim land."

By the time she graduated in 1995 with a biology degree, Aafia was well known to Boston's Muslim community as a dedicated worker on behalf of Islamic causes. "She attended many conferences. Whenever there was an event, she would come," said Imam Talal Eid of the Islamic Center of New England, a large mosque outside Boston. "She was very active in a position of leadership. Everybody liked her." Eid and others described her as very polite and correct, but driven.

On a visit home to Karachi, she had impressed the mother of a newly minted doctor. Mohammad Amjad Khan, or Amjad, as his family called him, was fresh out of medical school at Karachi's Aga Khan University. His father, Agha Abdul Khan, was the wealthy and successful owner of a pharmaceutical factory. The family lived in a large two-story house behind a high wall near the American School. The Khans visited the Siddiquis to propose a marriage between Aafia and Amjad. Aafia had applied and been accepted to begin graduate studies in neuroscience at Brandeis

University. Amjad's parents agreed that he could move to Boston to do his residency in anesthesiology while Aafia worked toward her doctorate. "It seemed like a good proposal," Fowzia recalls, and the Siddiquis accepted. As Aafia was still at MIT, the Khans agreed to hold the nikah, or wedding ceremony, over the telephone in 1995. In a graduation picture, she has exchanged her hijab for a mortarboard. She stands in front of the Charles River, a bunch of roses in hand, her head tipped slightly forward, a sweet smile on her face. She looks proud, shy, and very pleased.

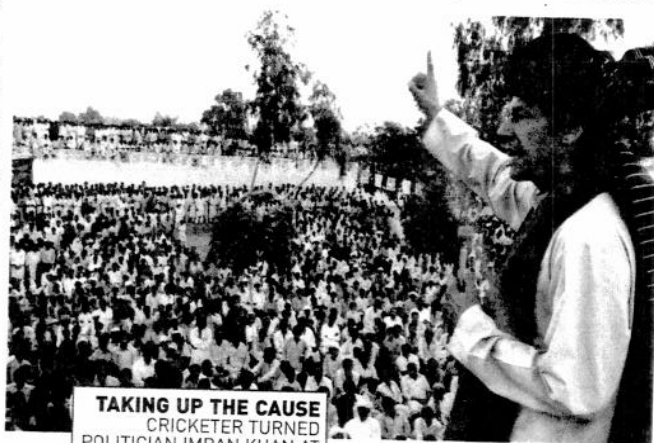
The newlyweds rented an apartment in Lexington, not far from the Brandeis campus. For a while they were happy, his relatives say. Both of them were extremely busy, especially after the birth of their son, Ahmed. At Brandeis, Aafia had started developing computer models of how humans process information at Robert Sekuler's vision lab. Her sister says that she ultimately wanted to use her studies to help learning-disabled children. But she remained committed to her political causes. In February 1995, Pakistan had arrested Ramzi Yousef, chief planner of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Yousef came from a jihadi family with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. One of his uncles, Zahid Sheikh Mohammed, ran Mercy International, the charity whose video Aafia had volunteered to distribute in Karachi. Another was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the future planner of 9/11. In a press statement announcing Yousef's arrest, the government of Benazir Bhutto

asked the U.S. and other Western governments for help in combating religious extremism. Aafia sent around a copy of Bhutto's remarks with a scornful note attached. "Pakistan has officially joined the typical gang of our contemporary Muslim governments . . . like Egypt, Algeria," she wrote. She closed the E-mail with a quotation from the Quran that warns believers against taking Jews and Christians for friends.

To be closer to Brigham and Women's, Amjad and Aafia

moved to Back Bay Manor, a brick high-rise apartment complex in the Mission Hill section of Roxbury. After the war in Bosnia ended, she began raising money for Kosovo. Her activism did not always sit well with Amjad, especially after their second child was born, a girl they named Miriam. "She sometimes neglected the children," one of his relatives told me. "[Amjad] got upset. His idea was the priority of the children. She was not very interested in family. She was giving speeches, fundraising for relief—things like that." Fowzia says that at the time she didn't know exactly what was wrong, but she noticed that Aafia didn't seem happy. "She had lost her contagious smile," she said. Since Aafia's disappearance, Fowzia and Aafia's brother have said Amjad beat Aafia and the children. Aafia's colleagues at Brandeis have told her lawyer that they remember her coming into the lab with bruises on her face.

Amjad's family says they know of only one incident. They said Aafia was speaking at some kind of Islamic



TAKING UP THE CAUSE
CRICKETER TURNED
POLITICIAN IMRAN KHAN AT
A 2002 ELECTION RALLY.
KHAN IS CURRENTLY
CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE
DETENTION OF UNCHARGED
SUSPECTS IN PAKISTAN.

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fund-raiser. She got so excited that she threw her own ring, an expensive one that Amjad had given her, into the collection bowl. Amjad, who was sitting in the audience with the children, was irritated, and his irritation grew when the baby began to cry. He told Aafia that it was time to go home and feed the baby, but Aafia insisted that she needed to stay. Taking the children, Amjad stormed out. Aafia ran after him, but at the apartment the argument broke out again. Amjad was clumsily trying to make the baby a bottle. "You don't know what you're doing!" Aafia supposedly shouted at him. "Take the bottle and do it like this—" Furious, Amjad turned around and threw the bottle at her. It struck her in the mouth. After that, they said, Amjad had to take her to the hospital for stitches.

Aafia finished her Ph.D. in the spring of 2001. One of her advisers asked her about her career plans. She replied that for the time being, her religion required her to concentrate on her family. Her friend Salma Kazmi recalls getting an E-mail from Aafia about her plans to start a children's play group at her Mission Hill apartment building. Fowzia has said her two children spent that summer in Aafia's care. "It was perfect for me," she said. "I couldn't get a better baby-sitter. She did games, songs, and different activities."

On June 16, 2001, while Fowzia says Aafia was singing and playing games at Back Bay Manor, a woman calling herself Ferial Shahin arrived in Monrovia, the Liberian capital ruled by the sinister dictator Charles Taylor and his battalions of child soldiers. Two al-Qaeda operatives, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani and Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, had turned up there earlier in the year. Both wanted in the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings, they began buying diamonds from Taylor, a graduate of Bentley College in Massachusetts who had escaped mysteriously from prison in Plymouth in 1985. Soon they were buying huge quantities of stones, apparently to provide al-Qaeda with assets that would be easy to transport and liquidate after 9/11. Al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan evidently decided to send the woman calling herself Shahin to oversee the operation.

One of Taylor's go-betweens was ordered to fax a visa to Quetta in Pakistan that would allow Shahin to bypass normal immigration procedures. The visa listed her as a guest of Ibrahim Bah, a Senegalese veteran of the Afghan jihad who now served as an aide to Taylor. It said she was a Lebanese national. Prior to her visit, Shahin evidently spent several days in Antwerp going over the books of the Lebanese firm that had been reselling the diamonds in Europe. Taylor's man picked her up from the airport in Monrovia and drove her to the same Hotel Boulevard where the other al-Qaeda operatives had stayed. He remembers that she wore a black gown, all the way to the floor, and a matching head scarf. She told him she worked for "the big boss" back in Pakistan. He said the al-Qaeda veterans, Ghailani and Mohammed, were visibly afraid of her. The woman stayed for about a week, then flew to Karachi with the two men. With her, the witnesses say, she carried a large packet filled with diamonds. After Aafia's picture was broadcast around the world

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in May 2004, Taylor's go-between identified her as Shahin.

The Siddiquis and their lawyer say there is no way in the world that Aafia could be Shahin. Their ex-in-laws the Khans, who disagree with them about so much, agree on this point. The Siddiquis' lawyer, Elaine Whitfield Sharp, points out that no U.S. official has accused Aafia of diamond-trading, and that eyewitnesses are notoriously unreliable when it comes to identifying people long after the fact, and even more so when the person is from another

race. She is hoping that one of the other mothers from Aafia's play group will come forward to testify that Aafia was at home taking care of children every day that week. Even if they don't, she believes credit-card receipts and other records will show that she never left the city. "She was here in Boston, and I can prove it," Sharp said.

Later in the summer of 2001, Amjad and Aafia abruptly left Back Bay Manor for a complex in Malden, a suburb north of Boston. As everyone remembers, September 11, 2001, dawned a crystalline blue that made that morning's devastating attacks seem all the more unforeseen—and unforeseeable. Within hours, the U.S. government was blaming Osama bin Laden. In Boston, as in other parts of the country, Muslims feared a backlash. Amjad, who had been taking summer courses at Harvard's School of Public Health, was enrolled to begin studies that month toward a master's degree. He never showed up, according to a spokeswoman for the school. His family say that Aafia demanded that they leave the U.S. immediately for Pakistan. Amjad was expecting a hospital bonus; he wanted to wait a few months. Aafia refused. "No, no, let me go with the children," they say she said. "You can come later."

Despite the worldwide chaos prevailing in airline travel, Aafia managed to get tickets leaving on September 19—the same day a plane arrived to fetch the eleven bin Ladens then living in Boston from Logan Airport. When she got to Karachi, she told the Siddiquis that she had been harassed and the children had been threatened after the attacks. Amjad made it a few months later. By then the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan had routed al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Some of the militants regrouped in Karachi, reportedly with the help of some within Pakistan's intelligence service. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Ramzi Yousef's uncle and the 9/11 planner, was at the head of this new cell. He reportedly has told U.S. interrogators that at this time he began looking for U.S. citizens and visa holders to carry out new attacks in the U.S. One he met was Jose Padilla, who was arrested upon arriving in Chicago May 2002 on suspicion of plotting a dirty-bomb attack. Two others were Adam Yahiye Gadahn, a young California convert, and Adnan el-Shukrijumah, the Saudi-born son of a Florida mosque leader who had once served as a translator for the blind sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman. Both Gadahn and el-Shukrijumah would later show up along with Aafia on Ashcroft's "Deadly Seven" list.

During this sojourn in Karachi, the Khan family say, they noticed friction between Amjad and Aafia for the first time. "Her nature doesn't suit me," Amjad complained to a relative. Aafia told her family she wanted to stay in Pakistan, but Amjad couldn't find a job he liked there. They returned to the U.S. on January 5, 2002. In Boston, the MIT (continued on page 589)

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won a \$1,200 "City Days" fellowship to clean up Cambridge elementary school playgrounds, and the year before, she had spent six weeks in Pakistan as the recipient of a \$5,000 Carrol L. Wilson traveling fellowship for outstanding students. Her project was to research the issue of "Islamization and its Effects on Women."

Many Pakistani human rights advocates regarded Zia's Islamic laws as a disaster for women. Under the 1979 code, for example, the penalty for having sex outside of marriage is death by stoning, and unwed pregnancy is considered proof of adultery unless four male eyewitnesses testify to rape. But a former education official whom Aafia interviewed for the project recalls that Aafia saw the laws in a positive light. "She was a beautiful girl, very charming, with a fair complexion and very religious-minded, and I must say having a very traditional sort of dress and hijab," or Islamic head scarf, said Irfan Siddiqui (no relation), now a columnist for the *Nawa-e-Waqt* newspaper in Islamabad. "You can't imagine that girl being a terrorist."

As I pieced her story together from interviews, court documents, and published reports, I came to believe that if Aafia was drawn into the world of terrorism, it may have been through the contacts and friendships she made in the early 1990s working for MIT's Muslim Student Association. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the world's oldest and biggest Islamist movement, established the first MSAs in this country during the sixties and seventies, and the movement's ideology continued to influence the MSA long after that. At MIT, several of the MSA's most active members had fallen under the spell of Abdullah Azzam, a Muslim Brother who was Osama bin Laden's mentor. Before he was killed in a still-unsolved 1989 bombing in the Pakistani border town of Peshawar, Azzam had worked with bin Laden to coordinate the Arab volunteers who flocked to Pakistan during the Afghan War.

In the eighties, he had established the al-Kifah ("The Struggle") Refugee Services Center to function as a worldwide recruiting post, propaganda office, and fund-raising headquarters for the mujahideen fighting in Afghanistan. Al-Kifah's U.S. headquarters was in Brooklyn, but it maintained offices in Boston, Tucson, Arizona, and many other American cities. It would become the nucleus of the al-Qaeda organization. At least two contemporaries of Aafia's at MIT's MSA, Suheil Laher and Mohamad Akra, were al-Kifah volunteers. Aafia soon took up the cause too.

In 1992, al-Kifah was in the process of shifting its focus from Afghanistan to Bosnia, where an embattled Muslim majority was trying defend itself against better-armed ethnic Serbs intent on "cleansing" the province of Muslims and Croats. In Boston, al-Kifah published *A Call for Jihad in Bosnia*. Listing reports that more than 100,000 Bosnians had been killed and that thousands of Muslim girls had been kidnapped and kept in Yugoslav army camps for sex, it urged readers who wished "to provide the emerging jihad movement in Bosnia with more than food and shelter" to send their donations to al-Kifah. That Aafia should have been deeply affected by Bosnia's suffering is not surprising.

As her sister says, Aafia was a highly sensitive, emotional person "always touched by anything in pain." What is unusual is that she chose to respond through al-Kifah.

The group was known to advocate armed violence. In 1990, an al-Kifah member in New York shot and killed Rabbi Meir Kahane, the militant founder of the Jewish Defense League. Then, in 1991, the head of al-Kifah's Brooklyn office was found murdered, and the blind Egyptian sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman seized control of the group. Though "the blind sheikh" was not then as notorious to Americans as he is today, Muslims knew that he had

been accused of giving religious sanction to the 1981 assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. Moreover, as an openly jihadist organization, al-Kifah was extremely male.

Evan F. Kohlmann, the author of the just published book *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe*, says Aafia is the only woman known to have regularly raised money for the group. "She's a very interesting person," Kohlmann said. "These guys were just so misogynistic, so filled with this bizarre machismo—yet for some reason, they prized this woman." They may have valued Aafia for the way she played upon that very machismo to shame Muslim men into discharging what al-Kifah's newsletter *Al-Hussam* ("The Sword") called "the obligation to fight the infidels." Imam Abdullah T. Faaruuq, the African-American spiritual leader of Boston's oldest mosque, the Mosque for the Praising of Allah, in Roxbury, got to know Aafia through a project she started as a student to distribute Qurans and other Islamic missionary materials to students and

prison inmates. He remembers what an effective speaker she was. "She used to encourage Muslim men to be Muslim," he said. "She used to say that you should take care of your families and be the best Muslim you can. She used to say, 'Where are the Muslim men? Why do I have to be the one to get up here and talk?' She wanted us to take a more proactive part in advancing the cause of Islam. Her voice was real sweet, but piercingly high. Some of the brothers used to say, 'Man, that sister's tough!'" One time, he said, when she was raising money for Bosnia, she asked the men in the crowd how many of them had two pairs of boots. She told them that if they had two pairs, they ought to send one to the Bosnians. "You don't need boots in this country," she scolded them. "They're facing a cold winter there!" The imam said he took off his boots and gave them to her.

The first bombing of the World Trade Center took place on February 26, 1993. Within only a few weeks, investigators were beginning to look into the possibility that the Brooklyn office of al-Kifah was involved. Ramzi Yousef, the Pakistani-born mastermind of the attack, had gone straight to al-Kifah's office after arriving in New York from Karachi. Several al-Kifah members were soon reported as having helped carry out the bombing. By August, the blind sheikh, along with three others, was indicted in New York for plotting to wage "a war of urban terrorism against the United States." Eventually the sheikh and nine others would be convicted of planning to blow up the United Nations, the George Washington Bridge, and New York City's tunnels. Yet less than a month after the bombing, Aafia was sending to Muslim newsgroups an E-mail pledge form for al-Kifah for "brothers" to support Bosnian widows *politics* >266

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circle had already come to the attention of the U.S. authorities. Immediately after 9/11, the FBI had come to question Suheil Laher and several other friends Aafia knew from al-Kifah. They would later become the focus of a wider investigation involving several Boston companies accused of giving financial aid to terrorism.

Auditors at Fleet Bank also had filed a suspicious activity report on an \$8,000 money transfer made from Amjad and Aafia's account to Habib Bank in Pakistan on December 21, 2001. Investigators then learned somebody using Aafia's E-mail and the couple's bank card had purchased night goggles, body armor, and military manuals on the Internet and ordered them to be delivered to Pakistan. In the spring of 2002, the FBI came to question the couple about these purchases. Sharp says that Amjad told the FBI he had bought the equipment for big-game hunting in Pakistan. After the FBI's visit, he returned the items. She says that Aafia was questioned only incidentally.

All of this cannot have helped an already fragile marriage. Aafia was pregnant again, and her father was ailing in Pakistan. She decided to take the children and go home to Karachi. To her surprise, Amjad announced that he would go back with them. The whole family left on June 26, 2002. Amjad's relatives say the marriage finally broke down for good late that summer in Karachi. Amjad went to the bank to ask about a \$2,000 withdrawal. The teller told him that Aafia had taken the money out on an earlier visit. "I can't trust you!" he is said to have told Aafia. "You hide things from me! We can't live together." Aafia took the children and moved in with her family.

Under Pakistan's Islamic laws, Amjad had the right to divorce Aafia by talaq, or saying "I divorce you" three times. Not long after their split he brought a letter over to the Siddiquis' bungalow saying just that. He and Dr. Siddiqui got into a violent argument. Dr. Siddiqui had a heart attack and died on August 15, 2002. Since then, the Siddiquis have refused to have anything to do with the Khans. They don't answer their phone calls or letters. "I liked her very much, but she was rigid and stubborn. Whatever she wanted to do, she was going to do," one of the Khans said sadly of Aafia. "She was so crazy to help the world!"

Aafia bore her third child, a boy she named Sulieman, in September alone in a Karachi hospital. Her divorce became final on October 21, 2002, after the iddat, or three-month waiting period, required by law. The Khans say the Siddiquis didn't even tell them

about the baby's birth. Eventually Amjad and his father filed a lawsuit claiming his right under Islamic law to see the children and to pay maintenance for them. Fowzia says Aafia perceived their demands and entreaties as harassment. "She was all set to go back to the U.S. because Pakistan was too traumatizing for her," Fowzia wrote in an E-mail.

On Christmas Day, December 25, 2002, Aafia flew to the U.S., leaving the baby and the two older children with her mother. She left a week later, on January 2, 2003. Fowzia, who was living in Baltimore, says Aafia visited Johns Hopkins University and SUNY to interview for jobs, even though both universities were closed that week for the holidays. Back in Pakistan, she E-mailed Sekuler, her former dissertation adviser, on February 11 and again on March 1 to ask for help finding a job in the U.S. She said she didn't know if her children would be returning with her.

In Pakistan, where Aafia is seen by many as a heroine, there are several theories about where she and the children might be now

On March 1, 2003, the Pakistani authorities announced that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed had been captured in a three A.M. raid in Rawalpindi. According to published reports, he gave names of some of his alleged accomplices, including Aafia Siddiqui, and within hours, the authorities began making arrests. One of these was a man identified in the press as Majid Khan, apparently no relation to Aafia's husband, Amjad. Khan allegedly told police that a few months before, Khalid had "tasked" him to move forward on a plot to blow up underground gas tanks around Baltimore. According to an arrest warrant filed by the FBI, Khan, a former Baltimore resident with refugee status, had left the U.S. without obtaining a travel document he needed to return. Trying to find a way for him to get back into the U.S., he and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in February met twice in Karachi with a 23-year-old business school graduate called Uzair Paracha. They told Paracha that they were supporters of Osama bin Laden, and they asked him to go to New York and impersonate Khan so that the Immigration and Naturalization Service would think he was still in the country. In

return, they proposed to invest \$200,000 in his father's import-export business. They told Paracha to call the INS pretending to be Khan, to use his credit cards and to deposit money in his bank account. They said the INS would send the travel document to a Gaithersburg, Maryland, post office box that Khan had opened together with a "good sister" who was helping them out. Paracha was to go to Maryland, pick up the documents, and close the P.O. box. Detectives say Uzair Paracha agreed and flew to New York in February.

Sometime in March—Ismat insists that she cannot remember the date—Aafia and the children left her mother's big white Karachi house in the minicab. Ismat said Aafia told her they were going to visit Ismat's brother in Islamabad. They never arrived. On March 10, the FBI arrived at Fowzia's door in Baltimore. On March 18, they put out a worldwide alert for Aafia and Amjad. On March 25, the Baltimore office of the FBI put out a special alert asking residents to be on the lookout for Aafia or her husband, identified as Mohammed Khan. On March 28, detectives interviewed Uzair Paracha in New York. According to the warrant for his arrest, he admitted to everything. Among his belongings, the detectives found Majid Khan's Maryland driver's license, his Social Security card, and receipts for the rental of a P.O. box in Gaithersburg. They also found the key to the Maryland P.O. box that the "good sister" had helped open.

In August, Uzair Paracha was indicted on five counts of conspiring to provide support for al-Qaeda. His trial is scheduled this month in New York. If convicted, he could face up to 75 years in prison. The U.S. Attorney's Office refused to comment on whether Aafia was the woman who opened the P.O. box with Khan. But they have questioned Fowzia and Ismat about a P.O. box Aafia is supposed to have opened in Maryland during her brief visit over the Christmas holiday. Still, as Sharp says, they have yet to charge her with anything. "A simple fingerprint comparison would tell us whether Aafia is one and the same as the so-called good sister who opened the post-office box," she said. "Has this been done? If it has, then why hasn't Aafia been indicted? Either they have the proof or they don't. They should put up or shut up."

According to the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn*, Pakistani law-enforcement authorities picked Aafia up as she was leaving a relative's house in Karachi on the same day that Uzair Paracha was being questioned in New York. The next day, March 29, they reportedly allowed the FBI to question her. Ismat has said that (continued on page 590)

(continued from page 589) a man riding a motorcycle visited her house that week to tell her not to "raise hue and cry" about her daughter unless she wanted to be crying for the rest of her life. On April 21, *NBC Nightly News* announced that Aafia had been detained in Pakistan. "Senior U.S. officials say Siddiqui definitely has ties to very radical individuals in Pakistan and may be working as a fixer for al-Qaeda," investigative reporter Lisa Myers said. A day later U.S. officials backed off, saying they were "doubtful" that she was in custody. They offered no explanation for their confusion. Her picture remained up on the FBI's Web site. Amjad's did, too, but his was soon marked LOCATED. His family says he has been practicing medicine in Karachi unhindered ever since.

In Pakistan, where the air is always thick with rumors and conspiracy theories and where Aafia is seen by many as a heroine, there are several theories about where she and the children might be now. Human-rights groups say the U.S. is keeping dozens of so-called high-value detainees in secret locations around the world where they are deprived access to any legal system. In Pakistan, I heard that detainees who have been released claim to have seen women in at least one secret U.S. prison. When the news reports appeared that Aafia was in U.S. custody, Ismat flew to New York to demand that agents from Homeland Security and the FBI tell her what they had done with Aafia and the children. In a deposition filed later with regard to the Khans' suit seeking custody of the children, she alleged that FBI and Justice Department representatives in Boston verbally told "the lawyer that the minors are with the mother and are in safe condition." But Sharp says U.S. officials have told her nothing of the sort. On the contrary, they have maintained that they have no idea where Aafia is. I called and wrote to the CIA, the FBI, and the U.S. Department of Justice to ask about Aafia's case. All three refused to discuss it, but a CIA official offered to give me "an off-the-record steer." "If you say we have her, you'll be wrong," this person said.

Another possibility is that the Pakistani government is keeping Aafia and the children in a safe house, perhaps where she can be questioned by U.S. intelligence. A spokesman for Pakistan's interior ministry told me that wasn't true. "She is not in Pakistan's custody," said Brigadier Javed Iqbal Cheema. But the government's earlier, contradictory statements and the peculiar way her family has behaved have led many well-informed Pakistanis to conclude that perhaps the Pakistani authorities do have her after all.

Imran Khan, the celebrity cricketer turned politician whose divorce from Jemima Khan made tabloid headlines last year, has tried to take up Aafia's case along with those of other Pakistanis who have vanished after being accused, but never charged, with helping al-Qaeda. One evening this fall, he met me at his Islamabad flat. Khan, who had just returned from a holiday in India with Hollywood star Goldie Hawn, is outraged by what he sees as the U.S.-sponsored kidnappings of alleged al-Qaeda suspects. "Where do they go?" he asked me indignantly. "No one knows. There's no judiciary involved, no police. . . . Some of these people are well known as philanthropists. Imagine the hatred toward the U.S. that is growing here. It is radicalizing our society." He said Aafia's uncle had contacted him to ask for help. But when he spoke to Aafia's mother and her sister, Fowzia, who has moved back to Karachi, they dissolved into tears and told him they had been warned not to speak out. "I told them, 'I can't speak if you won't come forward,'" Khan said. "But these poor women are too afraid."

The Siddiquis have not filed any legal motions in the U.S. or Pakistan, although the children's detention would be patently illegal in both countries. Aafia's uncle wrote a letter in March to *Dawn* complaining that the former interior minister had reneged on a promise to Fowzia and minister for religious affairs Ijaz ul-Haq that Aafia would soon telephone them. In a subsequent letter, he wrote that "after the publication of my March 30 letter, Dr. Aafia Siddiqui's mother and sister (along with her two children) have apparently been put under house arrest and are not allowed to have any physical or telephonic contact even with their family members." Through Sharp, the family denies that they have met with the interior minister or been under house arrest.

When I applied for a visa to write about Aafia's case, the Pakistani government insisted that I travel to Islamabad first to obtain a special internal permit to visit Karachi from the interior ministry—a procedure so unusual that when I finally got the permit, a Pakistani passport official told me he hadn't seen anything like it in 30 years. The Siddiquis had sent word through Sharp that they were not speaking to the media, and they did not answer their telephone or come out when a Pakistani colleague and I knocked at their gate. What looked like an intercom had been pulled out of the wall beside it. (Fowzia later agreed to answer by E-mail a few questions not pertaining to the case.)

A third and perhaps more ominous possibility is that Aafia and the children have done what U.S. and Pakistani governments have said all along—gone underground.

Shortly before Ashcroft's warning, a witness in Buffalo spotted a woman who fit Aafia's description in the company of Canada's most-wanted terrorist, Amer el-Maati. Reportedly, the two of them were filming in Niagara Falls. At the home of Khalid Khawaja, a former intelligence agent and a bin Laden supporter who has joined Imran Khan's campaign on behalf of the detainees, I met Zaynab Khadr, the 24-year-old daughter of another known Canadian al-Qaeda family, who formerly lived underground herself. She and Khawaja told me they didn't know Aafia or anything about the rumors that the intelligence services may have picked her up back in March 2003 and then released her. But they advised me to drop the subject. "This is an area where they don't want people to probe," Zaynab told me. "When they keep it so quiet, they want it to stay that way."

Hamid Mir, Osama bin Laden's biographer and a well-known Pakistani television journalist, believes Aafia could well still be at large. But he said he could not understand why Americans were fixated on the Brandeis and MIT graduate. After all, he said, there are many female jihadis who would be thrilled to help al-Qaeda. "Our women are more extremist than the men. There are hundreds of Aafia Siddiquis here." □

THE GIVING TREE

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achieve," and then she beamed at me, as if it really were that simple.

Wangari Maathai—born and educated in the highlands of Kenya—was a beneficiary of the "Kennedy Airlift," an inspired American initiative of the early sixties that arranged for East Africa's most motivated scholars to be sent to university in the United States. Maathai returned to Kenya in 1966, having earned a degree in biological sciences from Mount St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kansas, and a master of science degree from the University of Pittsburgh. In 1971, she got her Ph.D. from the University of Nairobi, becoming the first woman in East and Central Africa to have a doctorate. She became the University of Nairobi's first woman professor, in the department of veterinary anatomy (the study of animal physiology rather than animal health). "Everyone," she has joked, "thought I was a vet. So when their cat got sick, they brought it to me."

In the mid-seventies, Maathai left academic life and founded the Green Belt Movement, Kenya's most famous environmental and human rights—campaigning group, acting not only to save Kenya's forests but also in behalf of victims of "ethnic clashes." At its height, the GBM mobilized more than 100,000 women to form tree-nursery groups (the women earned \$1 for every fifteen trees