

**Hani's Tale -  
Profile of a Terrorist**

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<sup>1</sup> Photograph of Hani Hanjour, released by the FBI on September 16, 2001.

## Preface

An excellent example of investigative journalism appeared in The Washington Post on October 15, 2001. Entitled “*Hanjour – a study in paradox*”, it was written by Amy Goldstein, Lena H. Sun and George Lardner Jr., all Washington Post staff writers.<sup>2</sup>

In the words of the authors, their article is about the most enigmatic of the 19 hijackers who participated in the attacks on September 11. Hani Hanjour has been identified by the FBI as the terrorist behind the controls of American Airlines Flight 77, which was hijacked and deliberately crashed into the Pentagon.

Like Goldstein, Sun and Lardner, I was intrigued by the character of Hani Hanjour, but not as a paradox or an enigma. After reading the article in reference a third time, I put it down with a distinct feeling, I knew this type of man, and have met his kind before.

The facts presented in this working paper are correct to the best of my knowledge, but unfortunately I have had neither the time nor the resources to validate the information, at the time of writing, January 2002. While Hani’s actions and whereabouts may seem trivial, they are important in establishing what he was and wasn’t. However, all interpretations of Hani’s motives, his reasoning and emotional complexity are entirely my invention.

Why do I claim the ability to disentangle the motives of a suicide terrorist? First of all there is a vast body of conflict and terrorist literature that I have studied during the last decade. Most of it has been written by scholars who have never left the safety of their office and whose sole claim to an understanding rests on the statements and memories of others. For this reason, and others as well, I undertook a short period of fieldwork in Lebanon in 1995. Having established contact with the Hezbollah movement, and in the process gaining their confidence, I was allowed a rare glimpse into the illusory world of suicide bombers. Through talking to a number of sources, the reasoning and legitimisation behind this type of resistance was spelled out quite clearly. For the oppressed any weapon should be used in the struggle against injustice.

Even with my background in the field of international conflict studies, the events on September 11 present new challenges. Islamist studies have been a fringe research area for the past decade. Only a few vague warnings had been issued of the nature of the threat from armed Islamist groups. In spite of some professional hindsight, we are confronted with a novel research field which demands timely and accurate analysis. The first step is to admit that we must

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<sup>2</sup> “Hanjour – a study in paradox.” Goldstein, Sun & Lardner.

start over again, as it is obvious that no one had the ability to forecast the present situation.

The roots of the Islamist groups, and the Al-Qaeda network in particular, is composed of the ideology and motives of individuals. This area needs attention if we are to comprehend an illusive “enemy” who has nothing but contempt for different perspectives on the nature of the world. The argument presented in this paper is founded on an anthropological interpretation of a complex reality. In order to disentangle the character of a single hijacker one must look for a motive. The easiest explanation, and also the most popular, is one of religious fanaticism. This I believe to be an oversimplification. Rather is it a combination of motives, and the one that stands out is personal disillusionment. The different environments in which Hani lived are also of significance, as they helped shape his perceptions of right and wrong. The logical conclusion to this argument thus assumes that focussing on the individual alone will remain unsatisfactory. A culturally founded method of inquiry holds the prospect of shedding some much needed light on the nature of the Islamist cause and why it appeals to diverse groups of people in more than 60 countries.

## **Hani the Eternal Youth**

In an attempt to comprehend Hani's participation in the September 11 attacks, some trivial background information is of use. By using the available material, all of it gleaned from news sources, a rudimentary picture of Hani's movements can be established.

Of his childhood and upbringing there is only sketchy information available. Hani grew up in Taif, a popular resort of about 400,000 inhabitants in a mountainous region of Saudi Arabia. Taif is only a couple of hours' drive from Mecca through barren, dusty hills and impressive mountain scenery. On the outskirts of the town baboons and porcupines may again be seen, because the roaming of the goats has been restricted. Acacias and junipers grow in the desert and mountain areas, and herbs such as wild thyme. The prize of Taif is the souq: countless alleys lined with shops and small stalls selling just about everything. Much of the old Taif was destroyed in 1924, when Ibn Saud's religious warriors, the Ikhwan, captured it. This incident was deeply regretted by Ibn Saud himself, who later made Taif his summer capital to escape the oppressive heat and humidity of Jeddah and Mecca.

Hani's father worked in a food-supply business. The Hanjour's had seven children, of which Hani was the fourth. As a teenager Hani was unambitious, he thought of dropping out of high school to become a flight attendant. Being an average student, education held little promise for him, but his brother managed to persuade him to carry on. Being the most devoted of the children, he prayed and attended Mosque regularly at home and also later as he moved to the United States. He had no known political affiliations; his religious commitment seemed more of an inward spiritual practice rather than a political quest. If he had become involved with radical Muslim groups while he was still living in Saudi Arabia, none of his family members knew about it. Just over 5 feet tall, skinny and boyish, Hani's meek disposition made him quite unnoticeable.

At the age of 18 he visited his brother Abulrahman Hanjour, who was in the business of exporting luxury cars from the United States to Saudi Arabia. The older brother had set up his business in Arizona, and for reasons unknown Hani decided to take English classes. This then took place in 1990, when his brother signed him up for an eight-week course at the University of Arizona's Centre for English as a Second Language. His brother also rented a room for Hani, taking care to find a place near a Mosque. During his studies he met Susan Khalil and her family, forming a friendship with the Khalils. She later described Hani as "*very, very quiet, very shy and very religious.*" In trying to define his personality Mrs. Khalil stated, that "*Hani seemed awkward socially...a very meek, timid type of person.*" As will be shown later on, this characteristic fit Hani until the end. After his studies he left for Saudi Arabia, but he didn't forget the Khalil's. He returned to manage the family lemon and date farm outside Taif.

For the next five years he led a simple life, taking care of the orchard and doing common labour on the irrigation tanks. According to his brothers, he did not travel abroad during that period. He continued to work on the farm and returned at night to his parents' house to sleep.

In 1996 Abulrahman Hanjour called the Khalils and asked them if Hani could stay with them in Miramar, Florida where they had since moved. Being the kind people that they were their reply was "Of course."

Hani stayed at the Khalil residence for a month during the spring of 1996. According to Mrs. Khalil, Hani spent most of his time in his room or at the local Mosque. The Khalils always had people going in and out of their house, but Hani was different, especially in comparison to his older brother, who socialized and partied quite often. *"Of all my husband's colourful friends, he was probably the most nondescript of any, he would blend into a wall if he was standing next to the wall."* One thing that Susan Khalil did remember was Hani's lack of personal hygiene. She asked her husband, Adnan, to make sure Hani bathed and changed his clothes. After a few weeks she noticed that he hadn't brushed his teeth since arriving at their home. He had been too shy to ask for a toothbrush.

Hani arrived with a goal: he wanted to be a pilot. Mrs. Khalil helped him with the paperwork, and after a brief detour to California he returned to Arizona to attend Cockpit Resource Management Airline Training in Scottsdale, Arizona. The manager of CRM met Hani and described him as rather untalented in a cockpit. From September through November of 1996 Hani tried for a private pilot's license. He was reclusive with inadequate English skills, and after months at the academy showed little improvement. According to his instructor, he was a very poor student who skipped homework and missed flights. For about a year he had rented a house in Scottsdale together with a couple of other men of Middle Eastern origin. A neighbour remembered Hani as being unfriendly, bordering on rude, as Hani completely ignored him.

However, Hani didn't quit. Later on, in 1998, he approached the Sawyer School of Aviation, also in Phoenix. He paid \$300 to access the schools flight simulator. Wes Fults, who was the manager at Sawyer School of Aviation, recalled that Hani was introverted and appeared to be unhappy. Perhaps this was due to the lack of progress in his flying career.

Incidentally, it is important to note that the Sawyer school of Aviation later had another interesting student from abroad, Lotfi Raissi from Algeria. Mr. Raissi was later charged with providing pilot training to 4 of the 19 hijackers. The school's former chief flight instructor, Sylvia Stinson, later recalled that Mr. Raissi had trained others at the facility, but was unable to name them. At some point, another man also joined the simulator training. This was Ziad Jarrah, who on September 11 was at the controls of United Flight 93, which crashed in rural Pennsylvania.

After finishing his simulator work Hani spent some time in San Diego. According to the FBI, his movements were linked with two of the Pentagon hijackers, Khalil Al-Midhar and Nawaf Al-Hamzi. Like Hani they were keen on being pilots, aspiring to fly commercial jets. But as the instructor recalls, they were *“two guys who had probably never opened the hood of a car.”*

In San Diego the three men lived together in an apartment complex. A neighbour, Ed Murray, who lived across the street from them, remembered them as a quiet lot. Whenever he would walk his dog at night, the three men would be busy watching and playing flight-simulator games. They would leave the front door open, but displayed no desire to have any form of contact with the other residents. This attitude struck Mr. Murray as strange. They were introverts to the extent that they would leave the pool if someone entered. They kept to themselves but were always busy on their cell-phones. Another neighbour, Nancy Cooker, noticed that they had been picked up by a limousine several times and always late at night. That was unusual, as limousines are a rare sight in the neighbourhood and are bound to attract attention.

During his stays in the US Hani was dependent on his family, primarily his father, for financial support. He did not provide an income for himself and thus maintained a relationship with his family founded on their goodwill. While this situation is not uncommon in the Middle East, it is unknown if Hani felt a moral dilemma from this situation. He deceived his family and smeared the family name, but whether or not he was bothered by it is not known.

By 1999 Hani had accumulated the required 250 hours to fly with a Federal Aviation Administration examiner. The license was actually awarded in April and issued to him later that year. On his documents Hani stated his address as a post office box in Saudi Arabia, though for the past year he had actually lived in San Diego with Al-Hamzi and Al-Midhar. The hard-won pilot's license expired six months later because he failed to complete a required medical exam. Perhaps he had realized by then that his skills were inadequate to get him a job, and had given up the prospect of becoming a professional pilot.

In September 2000, Hani applied from Saudi Arabia for a one-month intensive English course scheduled for November 2000 at the ELS Language Centre at Holy Names College in Oakland, California. Like any other foreign student, he provided the language school with transcripts and a bank letter certifying that he could afford the \$1,325 program. The school sent Hani an immigration form which he used to obtain a student visa from a US consulate. Hani never again contacted the school after his acceptance, but instead used his visa to enter the United States legally. Fifteen of the nineteen hijackers entered the United States on business, tourist or student visas, federal officials have revealed. The US Immigration and Naturalization Service, have known

difficulties in tracking foreign students entering the country, making the student visa one of the preferred means of entering discreetly.

In January of 2001, Hani enrolled in yet another flight school, The Pan Am International Flight Academy at Deer Valley Airport in Phoenix. The instructors were concerned about his poor English skills to the point where they felt compelled to take action. English is the global language of aviation and a good command of it is required of all commercial pilots, so the instructors contacted the Federal Aviation Administration to discuss the situation. An FAA agent was dispatched to the Pan Am Academy to monitor Hani's language abilities. The agent suggested that Hani should be linked with an Arabic speaker to assist him. Whatever happened didn't help Hani; he flunked out in March.

The spring of 2001 appears to be the last time Hani was in touch with his family. Calling his mother from a payphone, claiming that he was in the United Arab Emirates, he told her he would call again when he had his own number. He said he might be home for a visit in a month or so, but never showed up. His family was convinced that Hani had moved to the United Arab Emirates in 1999 to look for a job as a pilot. It is not known whether or not he had been recruited at this time. Either Hani was told not to inform his family about his presence in the United States, or he preferred to tell a lie rather than admit his career as a pilot was over before it really began.

In the summer of 2001 a former employee at the US Transportation Department, Evelyn Fierro, was on a regular flight from Washington to California. She noticed that the man in the seat next to her was studying papers that had "Federal Aviation" printed at the top. An outgoing woman, Mrs. Fierro then proceeded to ask if he was in transportation. He answered, that he was studying to be a pilot, a statement that caused Mrs. Fierro to tell him about her work at the Department of Transportation. To this revelation Hani leaned over and related this information to his friend sitting next to him. They both seemed to express mild disdain. In her usual friendly way Mrs. Fierro then suggested to Hani that he should talk to the flight crew about visiting the cockpit. He did not respond, which Mrs. Fierro interpreted as shyness on his behalf. She noticed his name on his paperwork, and wanted to ask him about his origin. Sensing that her curiosity would not be well received, she didn't ask, but the name registered. As they rose to leave the plane Mrs. Fierro turned to Hani and smiled. "*Good luck*", she said. Hani looked puzzled. "*You know, being a student pilot. Good luck.*" The only response was blank stares from both men, which she interpreted as social ineptness.

During the summer of 2001 Hani's movements become a little easier to track. The FBI believes that he flew together with Lotfi Raissi in Arizona on June 23. Mr. Raissi was born in Algeria, where he received his basic aviation training before moving to the United States in about 1996. The FBI has collected

a damning dossier on Mr. Raissi, placing him at the very centre of the terrorist cells. The dossier claims that Mr. Raissi was responsible for training the four hijackers at the controls of the hijacked planes. According to the details released to the Bow Street Magistrates Court in London, the FBI believes that between June 10 and 11 Mr. Raissi made a series of trips in the US. During these trips he and Hani and three other unidentified men attended several flight schools for training. At some of the schools Mr. Raissi merely handled access to the planes, while at others he flew with the hijackers. These claims are still being debated. On June 23 both Hani and Mr. Raissi enrolled at Sawyer Aviation School. Raissi reportedly trained at the simulator for the following seven days, while Hani stayed on until July 29

Between June and August Hani and Al-Hamzi rented cars on three separate occasions from the Borough Jeep-Chrysler dealership in Wayne, New Jersey. All of the vehicles were returned without problems, and at least one had been driven 1000 miles.

On August 1, 2001, Hani and Khalid Al-Midhar met Luis Martinez-Flores, an illegal immigrant from El Salvador. The latter was hanging out around the parking lot of a 7-11 convenience store in Falls Church, Virginia. The hijackers were looking for a Virginia resident to fraudulently co-sign their residency forms. They were directed to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles office at the Springfield Mall in nearby Springfield. A deal was struck, and Mr. Martinez-Flores was paid \$100 to let them use his address of Leesburg Pike in Falls Church as their own. The following day Hani and Al-Midhar went back to the DMV office, where they used their newly acquired Virginia ID cards. At the office they attested to the legal residency of Majed Moqed and Salim Al-Hamzi.

Also during August, Hani flew three times from a flight school at Freeway Airport in Bowie, Maryland. The timing suggests that he was brushing up his skills for the real thing on September 11. Hani tried to get permission to rent a plane on his own from the airport, but demonstrating his competence as a pilot had the reverse effect. Even though he was licensed to fly multi-engine aircrafts, and his logbook showed 600 hours, his skills were terrible. The airport's chief flight instructor, Marcel Bernhard, conferred with his instructors, who had serious doubts about Hani's abilities. *"They told me he flew so poorly that they were not willing to give him an endorsement to fly our planes."*

Furthermore, Hani refused to provide an address and a phone number. As a result his rental request was turned down. He eventually managed to get aloft three times with an instructor accompanying him. They flew the routine path in the area around the airport, while Hani kept silent. Landings were not Hani's specialty: the instructors literally had to take control of the small Cessna 172 each time he tried to land it properly.

Hani, Al-Hamzi and Mohammed Atta were in Las Vegas on August 13, 2001, but federal investigators have been unsuccessful in pinning down their movements.

Paterson, New Jersey, is about one hour's walking distance from downtown Manhattan. In the space of only 12 square kilometers some 170,000 people from more than 70 nationalities live and work. Paterson contains one of the principal Muslim communities in the state of New York. It is a perfect place if you do not want to attract attention. Here, in a one-bedroom apartment at 486 Union Avenue, Hani stayed together with Ahmed Al-Ghamdi, Nawaf Al-Hamzi and Salim Al-Hamzi. According to the landlord, Hani paid the rent each month in cash.

On August 31 Hani walked into the office of ATS Travel in Totowa, which is less than 3 km down the road from his apartment. Another hijacker, Majed Moqed accompanied Hani and it was he who did the talking. Both of them were clean-shaven, well dressed and unassuming. The pair initially asked for two first-class seats on a morning flight to Los Angeles. When the travel agent told them their options, they went with the flight originating from Dulles Airport in Washington, and for some reason they bought only one ticket – for Hani. A request was made for a front aisle seat, and he got 1B. For identification purposes, Hani presented his fake ID: a Virginia driver's license with a Falls Church address, the one countersigned by Mr. Martinez-Flores. When they tried to pay with a VISA card it was declined. They both left the ATS travel agency and shortly after Mr. Moqed returned with the exact amount, which he had withdrawn from the Hudson Bank. Whether or not the credit card was counterfeit is not known. What is interesting, however, is the fact that they were not bothered by leaving a signature that could be traced to them. Mr. Moqed was also on flight 77, but opted to buy his ticket at Dulles Airport instead.

In early September Hani, Khalid Al-Midhar and Majed Moqed paid cash for a one-week membership at Gold's Gym Health Club in Greenbelt, Maryland. They came several times to exercise and were joined by Nawaq Al-Hamzi and Salim Al-Hamzi. Together the five men completed the cell that was to take control of American Airlines Flight 77.

Very little information has been released about the movements of Hani on September 11. At 8:10 American Airlines flight 77 departed Dulles Airport in Washington D. C. bound for Los Angeles. The Boeing 757-200 had two pilots, four flight attendants and 58 passengers aboard. Among those 58 were Khalid Al-Midhar, Nawaq Al-Hamzi, Salim Al-Hamzi, Majed Moqed and Hani Hanjour. After overpowering the crew and taking control of the aircraft the flight was diverted towards the Pentagon. According to the FBI investigation the hijackers herded the passengers into the rear of the plane. It is also presumed that Hani was at the controls and that the transponder had been switched off to

prevent the plane from being tracked. Air Force fighter planes were dispatched to intercept the aircraft, but they arrived too late. Flight 77 crashed into the east wing of the Pentagon at 9:40, killing all aboard as well as 190 other people.

### **How Hani was Failed by Allah**

Hani had a special relationship with Allah. He attended prayers at the Mosque regularly and was considered the most religious of his brothers and sisters. Whether or not he had friends or kept any company with other worshippers at the Mosque has not been revealed. How was Hani, a supposedly devout and righteous Muslim, transformed into someone who could later partake in a suicide bombing mission inflicting mayhem on others? There is no evidence of Hani having displayed any form of deviant behaviour, neither in Saudi Arabia nor in the United States. Suicide even in the name of Jihad, as well as the slaughtering of innocent civilians, is strictly prohibited in the Qur'an. In order to understand the complexities of religio-politically inspired suicide actions, the Lebanese predicament is of interest.

Even the spiritual leaders of the Lebanese Hezbollah movement had difficulties explaining to their community how killing oneself in the name of Allah could be justified. Knowing that these actions would bring severe repercussions from the Shi'a community in Lebanon, the suicide operations were outsourced to a front organization, Islamic Jihad. Hezbollah denied all responsibility or even knowledge of these actions, only for the sake of not having to face the task of legitimisation. The result was a very sceptical community, one that not only recognized the demoralizing effect on the enemy, but also claimed that demoralization worked both ways. The level to which the war had sunk did not go down well in the southern suburbs of Beirut which supplied the majority of suicide assassins. There appears to be a division within the Muslim community of the legitimate use of suicide actions. The overwhelming majority of Muslims considers this type of action as repulsive and contrary to the ethics of the Qur'an. The experiences of the Hezbollah movement provide useful insight into the moral dilemmas that confront each individual suicidal terrorist operator. Should he choose to accept the mission it is without the understanding or endorsement of the population in general or the Islamic clergy. In the name of Jihad, the terrorist deliberately removes himself from the very religious and cultural foundations he is trying so desperately to protect.

Hani was a religious young man, but his relationship with Allah was troubled. One may initially suspect that although on the surface he appeared to have immersed himself completely in the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, this was merely a conforming exercise. This is not correct. There is no reason to believe that Hani had rejected his faith; I am quite sure that he didn't. Somehow Hani must have missed the point of the Quranic message, which is one of understanding, dialogue and compassion. The violent action in which he was a knowing part asserts a transgression of all ethical rules according to Muslim practice. In order to complete the transition from regular Mosque attendee to

suicide bomber, Hani must have undergone a period of questioning. He did not reject Islam at any time; had he done so his fellow suiciders would not have included him in their unit, simply for reasons of trust.

Hani's journey through maturity never ended. Even at the ripe age of 29 he seemed insecure about the nature of the world and about himself in particular. As his state of personal insecurity can be considered an established fact, it is logical to assume that Hani went through a period of personal questioning of Allah. This inner dialogue was centred on meaning and Hani's search for direction. Hani had many questions, but Allah never materialized to give him a straight answer. In this quest he was left to his own devices. When a religious foundation fails to provide meaning and direction, a sense of disillusion sets in. This is not easily overcome, regardless of the individual's social and cultural background.

Hani's enrolment in the holy war was a decoupling of two inseparable elements of Islam, meaning and action. At the very centre of all Islamist movements is a novel interpretation of the Qur'an. Specific social and political circumstances provide a need for action, and Quranic statements separated from their context then become the justification. The moral and religious justifications of the Al-Qaeda network are utterly removed from the traditional interpretations of Islamic scholars on the Quranic messages. Why Hani would sign up for Jihad seems irrational at first. But it represents a logical step for the devout believer who has lost his bearings.

## **The Company You Keep**

As has been clearly illustrated, Hani was a modern King Midas in reverse. Everything he touched turned into anything but gold. His insecurity and perpetual shyness made him as dull as wallpaper. Uncomfortable around women, especially the more liberal kind, he often acted rude to shield himself. By any professional standard, he appeared as a very unlikely terrorist. He lacked special training, political involvement and dedication to his tasks.

His political involvement was either very low-key or non-existent, the latter being the most probable. Hani is not known to have been active in anything, anywhere. It is difficult even to speculate about his involvement with suspected terrorists, but an attempt must be made. Growing up in the Taif region in Saudi Arabia, and later while working on the family farm, he must at least have overheard discussions about the political situation in the kingdom. The tensions between the monarchy and the Islamists intensified during the last decade, and some chose to declare war on the ruling institutions by declaring them un-islamic. This grouping of course includes the renowned Osama Bin Laden. These events cannot have escaped Hani's attention, even if he tried. The hostile attitude of the Saudi Islamists towards the United States must have accompanied him abroad. The extent to which it influenced his perception of American politics, culture and social standards is not known.

What is obvious, however, is the fact the he was recruited by terrorists acting in the name of Allah. At some point a contact emerged. The most likely scenario is one where Hani was approached by an Al-Qaeda recruiter because of his regular Mosque attendance and his pilot's license. He was the only alleged pilot who did not appear to have been part of a European Al-Qaeda cell. Even the most desperate terrorist recruiters have some sense of security. Hani was probably treated kindly and with respect in order to test his political and religious affiliations. He probably displayed little knowledge about current affairs and was thus categorized as "*neutral – possible recruit*". A person with this label is then tended for a period of time, further developing the friendship to which the introverted Hani may have become addicted.

Sooner or later the terrorists had to reveal themselves and their objectives, but in reality they revealed nothing. Hani was invited to join, a proposition only turned down at a grave risk to his life. In the formative stage Hani would most likely perform menial tasks, such as delivering irrelevant messages. For a period of time he had to pass these various tests before being formally accepted into the cell. His response needs no further elaboration.

This inclusion into a secret society must have appealed to Hani. Coercion was unnecessary because Hani's new friends were everything he wasn't. They displayed self-confidence, a mission in life and an unshakeable belief in Islam.

They treated each other like brothers and cared for one another. By living together they also shut themselves off from the real world, reinforcing their closed circle. Studies of small group dynamics have shown that the mission may expand beyond any one individual's commitment<sup>3</sup>. When things get "questionable" the implications are simply not discussed. No one wants to back out, and the newfound comradeship takes on a life of its own. Hani's inclusion into the terrorist cell was without any obvious warning signs. The best proof is the statement by his family that they thought he really liked the United States. He merely slipped into his newly acquired role as terrorist, slowly but surely. He had no criminal record or psychological deficiencies that we know of.

The only thing that Hani ever succeeded in was terrorism. The eternal youth was a socially inept underachiever, who had difficulties in conducting simple conversations and maintaining personal hygiene. Exactly when this new life started for him is not known; that particular question is better left to the FBI. The crucial point is that Hani was offered a chance to start over again, which must have been very tempting. He chose to abandon his family, lying to his mother of his whereabouts, in exchange for a new family. Being somebody else was important to Hani.

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<sup>3</sup> "Suicide bombers don't fit profile." Wilgoren.

### **The quest for Anything**

The lesson to be learned from Hani's tale is straightforward. His desire to exchange his dreary life for a more exiting, adventurous and above all a meaningful existence was paramount. As will be shown, Hani had nothing to lose.

Hani's dedication to the Islamist cause represents the fundamental break away from traditional society. By his actions he transformed himself into the opposite of what could be expected of his background. Family values deteriorated without the guidance of his paternal home. His actions were certain to cause embarrassment and shame to the family name, a matter about which they had no say or knowledge. Although he considered himself a religious person, Hani forgot that the Holy Qur'an represents the truth to the faithful Muslim. To him it failed to provide the answers he sought and lost its natural role in the life of a common Saudi youth. In this process Islam also lost its ability to remain unquestionable, and the pillar Hani used for support throughout his life disappeared.

So what motivated Hani to become a terrorist? A combination of factors, some of which are very personal. It seems likely that Hani the introvert had a desire to connect to others and acquire some sort of status. He couldn't fly properly; there was no way he could return to Saudi Arabia with honour and practice his skills. Going home meant tending the lemon trees and watering the date palms. He would return as a failure. In an interview with Abulrahman Hanjour the sincere grief and bewilderment of the family is clear. *"We are in shock. We thought that he liked the US.... I would think he would give his life to save lives, not to do this."*

The truth of the matter is that had Hani been approached by a Muslim charity NGO he would have signed on immediately. All he wanted was a mission in life and the prospect of close friends. He got what he wanted when he was accepted as a full member of a terrorist cell, where his background had no importance. Deluded by the rhetoric of honour and idealism, Hani actually acquired the power to control other people's lives. He never really got an American friend, and certainly not a girlfriend. Even though he had lived in the United States for a long time, he still considered himself alien. The cultural gap was wide, at least for him to bridge on his own. Instead of enjoying himself while studying in the United States he had become a spectator.

The purported religious motivation of the hijackers and the larger terrorist network is easily rejected, the proof being that the absolute taboos within the Islamic faith were broken. The deliberate misinterpretation of Jihad, the use of suicide activists, and the rejection of any form of dialogue with the "enemies of Islam" assert that this struggle has less to do with religion than politics. For Hani

is was not about religion, politics, history, oil resources or terrorism, those elements were merely invoked as excuses for action. What is at stake is a very personal and individual quest that cannot be stopped by conventional military means. The 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center provides some insight into the manner of justification of the terrorists. Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the alleged mastermind of the attack, was primarily motivated by delusions of superiority and moral impeccability. He claimed to be engaged in a holy war against the United States and to have massive public support. By portraying his actions as being part of a broader struggle he legitimised the atrocity. Curiously absent from Mr. Yousef's court statement was any declaration of religious content. When specifically asked about his religious views, he was evasive. Mr. Yousef was motivated by a combination of political, religious and personal reasons.

The individual Al-Qaeda operator is attracted to the cause for personal reasons, many due to a feeling of loss of direction. This alienation serves to legitimate an unprecedented form of holy war. At least some circles in the Muslim world have felt inspired by the uncompromising stance of the Islamist movements. The words of Abdul Haqq Baker, the leader of the Brixton Mosque, where Richard Reid aka "The Shoe bomber" used to pray and study are worth noticing. *"There are hundreds of disaffected young Muslims tired of their parent's understanding of Islam and how it is taught in the Mosques.... They like the fiery rhetoric of Jihad; they like to hear they are living among the infidel."*

Richard Reid is another unlikely terrorist. In looking for rational explanations for his behaviour elements such as poor parental guidance, a sense of deprivation, the rootless-ness of a mixed-race child, a lack of direction and authenticity in life all appear to be culprits. But many people endure similar circumstances and worse without displaying violent self-destruction inclinations

Truth and justice are at the best of times difficult topics to grasp. Some spend a lifetime trying to answer these fundamental questions of life, but others are not content to wait. The latter choose to interpret the world in black and white, thus short-circuiting their personal development. The latter deliberately adopt a simplistic view of the world in which anything can be explained according to the Holy Scriptures. If their view of the world cannot be found in the index, paragraphs are taken from their context to justify the cause. This path is admittedly much easier to follow and has inspired a considerable number of youths. The September 11 attacks serve as a general warning of the extent of the power of the disillusioned. The lesson to observe is the fact that the attacks also served as the foundation for massive recruitment to the Islamist cause. When a nobody like Hani can achieve international attention, others will feel inspired to follow in his footsteps.

## Literature:

1. "Hijacker's helper to get slap on wrist."

Timothy P. Carney

WorldNetDaily

December 24, 2001.

2. "Hijack suspect seen in N.J. in summer."

CNN International Online

October 29, 2001.

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## **Summary**

This working paper attempts to portray the motives of suicide terrorists by looking closer at one of the hijackers of the September 11 attacks. Through collecting the few known facts about Hani Hanjour of Flight 77 a pattern emerges which suggests that we are dealing with a new type of terrorist. The paper argues that the motivation of the individual terrorist is a complex phenomenon, and cannot simply be ascribed to religious interpretations. This particular hijacker had no known political affiliations, nor did display any deviant behaviour.

What others have described as paradoxical actually holds the key to interpreting and understanding this type of behaviour. Thus the new type of terrorist is likely to have his origin in an environment where there is little hope of predicting any form of irrational or violent behaviour. The primer for this novel type of terrorism is personal disillusionment; religious and political ideology is only introduced later on as forms of legitimization.

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