

Al Qaeda Financing and Conflict Diamonds A Sentinel TMS Analysis

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Introduction

Washington Post investigative reporter Douglas Farah, European investigators, and the Sierra Leone war crimes tribunal have uncovered a multitude of evidence suggesting that Al Qaeda has been operating in West Africa for years. There they have built an extensive operation using so-called “conflict diamonds,” much harder to trace than bank accounts, to hold their assets. Using Farah’s reporting and other open-source information, I compiled a database of information on Al Qaeda and diamonds using Sentinel TMS. This document presents examples of ways Sentinel TMS can help organize and analyze information, using the example of Al Qaeda and West Africa. I shall move from a broad overview to increasingly detailed looks at the way the network operates and how it fits into the larger Al Qaeda story.

Sentinel TMS also incorporates a variety of “gradient metrics” drawn from the field of Social Network Analysis. These metrics break down data in numerous ways. One example is the way Sentinel TMS picks out “hubs”: entities that are, we might say informally, at the center of everything. In the picture below, entities shade from red, the biggest hubs, to yellow, the least important hubs:

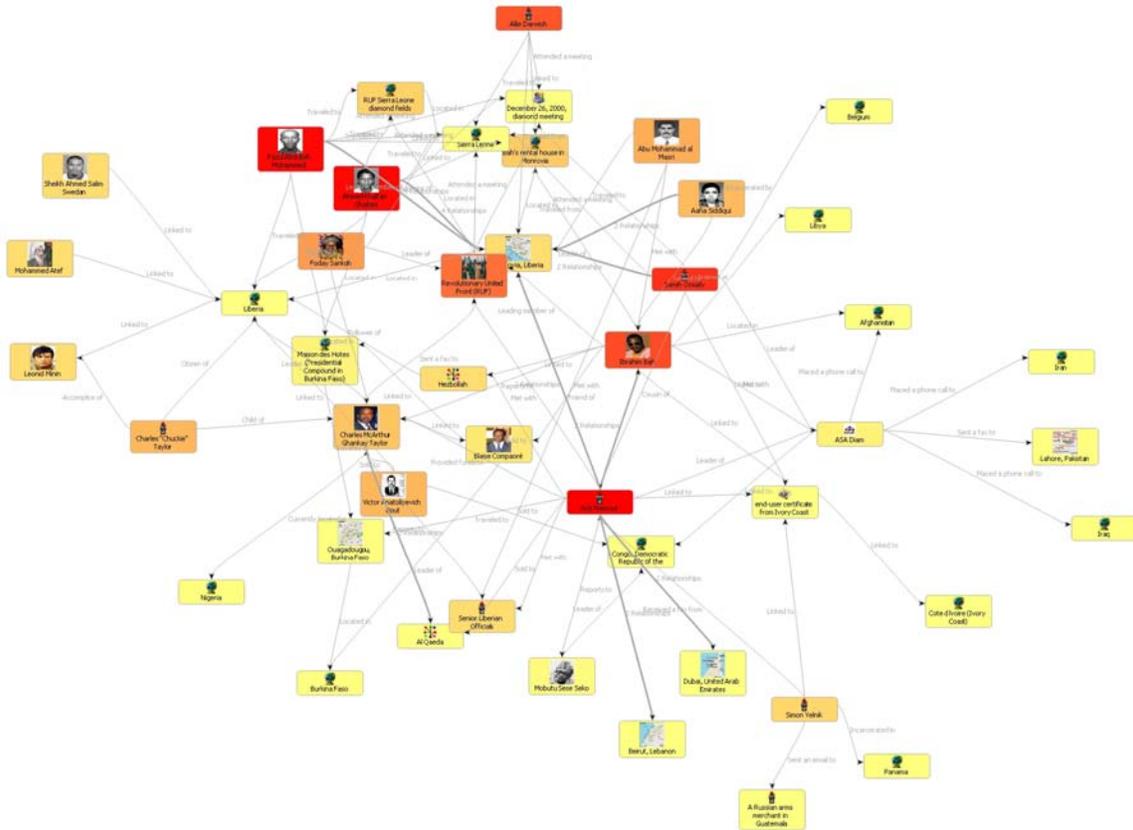


Figure 4

Details

Figure 2 helped us identify the biggest threats in the West African network: Aziz Nassour, Ibrahim Bah, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, Abu Mohammed al Masri, and Aafia Siddiqui. I shall now look at how Sentinel TMS can show us more in-depth information about what these people were doing in Africa and how they are connected to the larger world of Al Qaeda.

Aziz Nassour and Ibrahim Bah

Within the Sentinel TMS software, one can click directly on the entity boxes or relationship lines to pull up more detailed information about entities or relationships. On the web, one can navigate through static hyperlinks to pull up the same information. Figure 5 shows Nassour's extended links:

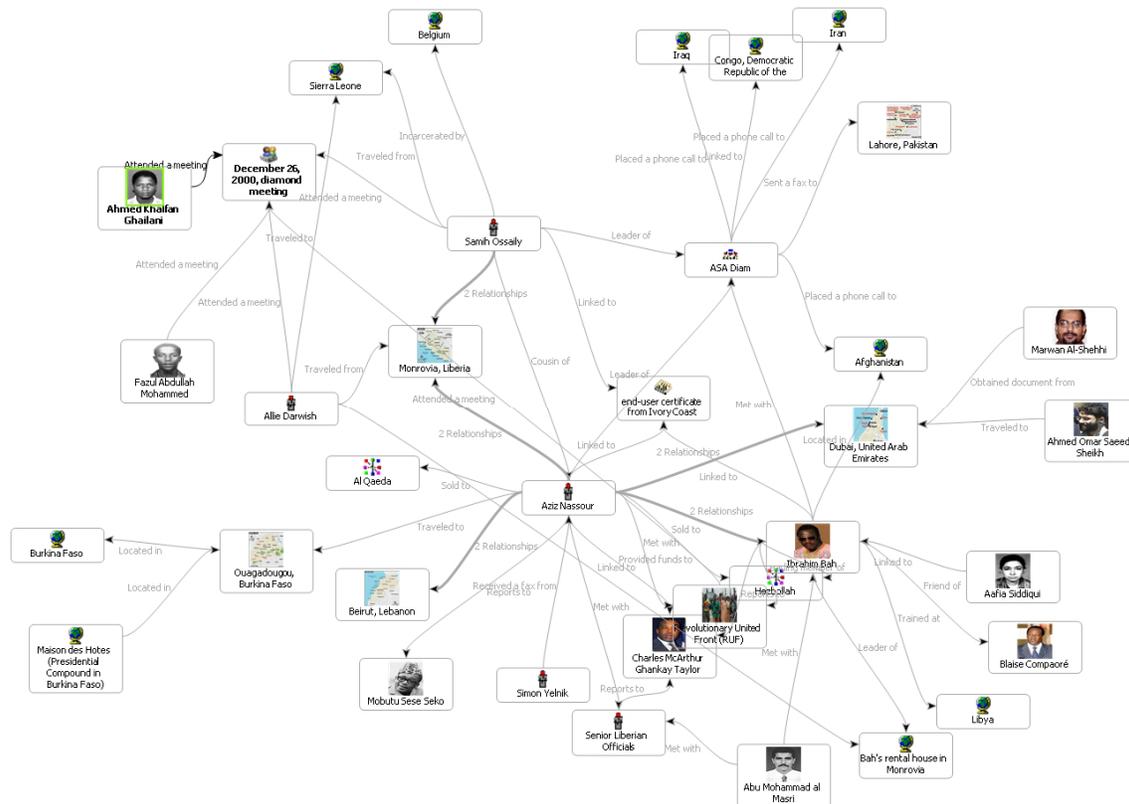


Figure 5

The information within these relationships and entities reveals that Nassour is the Lebanese diamond merchant who actually sold the diamonds to Al Qaeda. From Figure 5 we can see that he met directly with Al Qaeda operatives Ghailani (recently captured in Pakistan) and Mohammed. Nassour and his cousin, Samih Ossaily, ran a company called ASA Diam. ASA Diam had suspicious communications with people in such places as Congo, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The two cousins also had many connections throughout West Africa, and to the diamond-trading hotspots of Lebanon and Belgium.

Nassour worked closely with Ibrahim Bah, another individual identified by Sentinel TMS as a top threat. Figure 6 examines Bah's connections more closely:

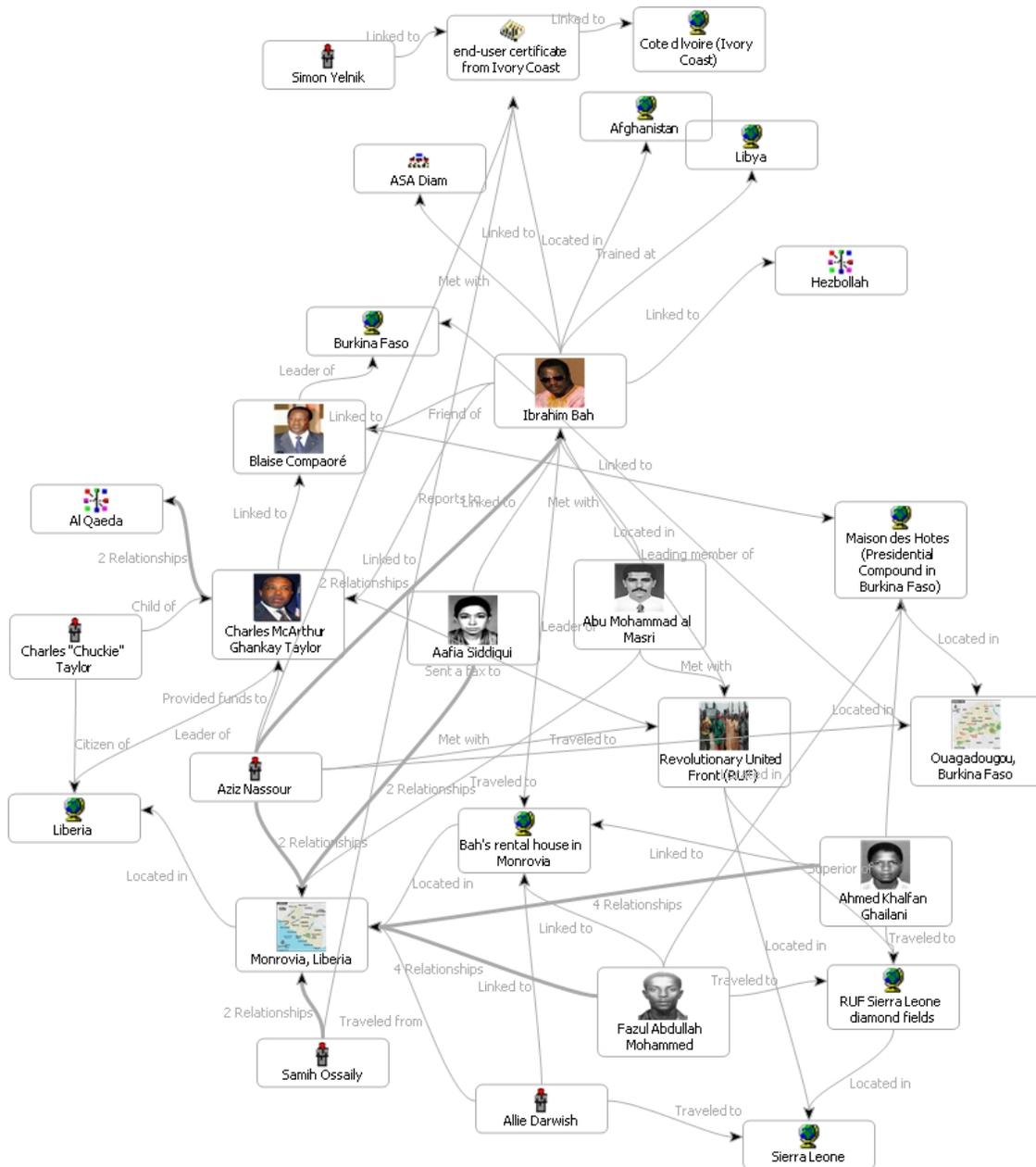


Figure 6

A general in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Bah also reported to Liberian strongman Charles Taylor, a notorious RUF supporter. The RUF was one of the largest “conflict diamond” providers in West Africa. Bah connected them in turn to Al Qaeda and the diamond dealers, enabling Al Qaeda to corner this segment of the diamond market in 2001. He met with high-ranking Al Qaeda figures Aafia Siddiqui and Abu Mohammed al Masri, and his deals with Taylor and the neighboring leader of Burkina Faso Blaise Compaoré ensured that, for a price, the Al Qaeda agents could operate safely.

Fazul Abdullah Mohammed and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani

Although Ghailani is no longer as much of a threat because he was apprehended in Pakistan recently, he and Mohammed were Al Qaeda's "men on the ground" in West Africa. Figure 7 shows a select expansion of their extended network:

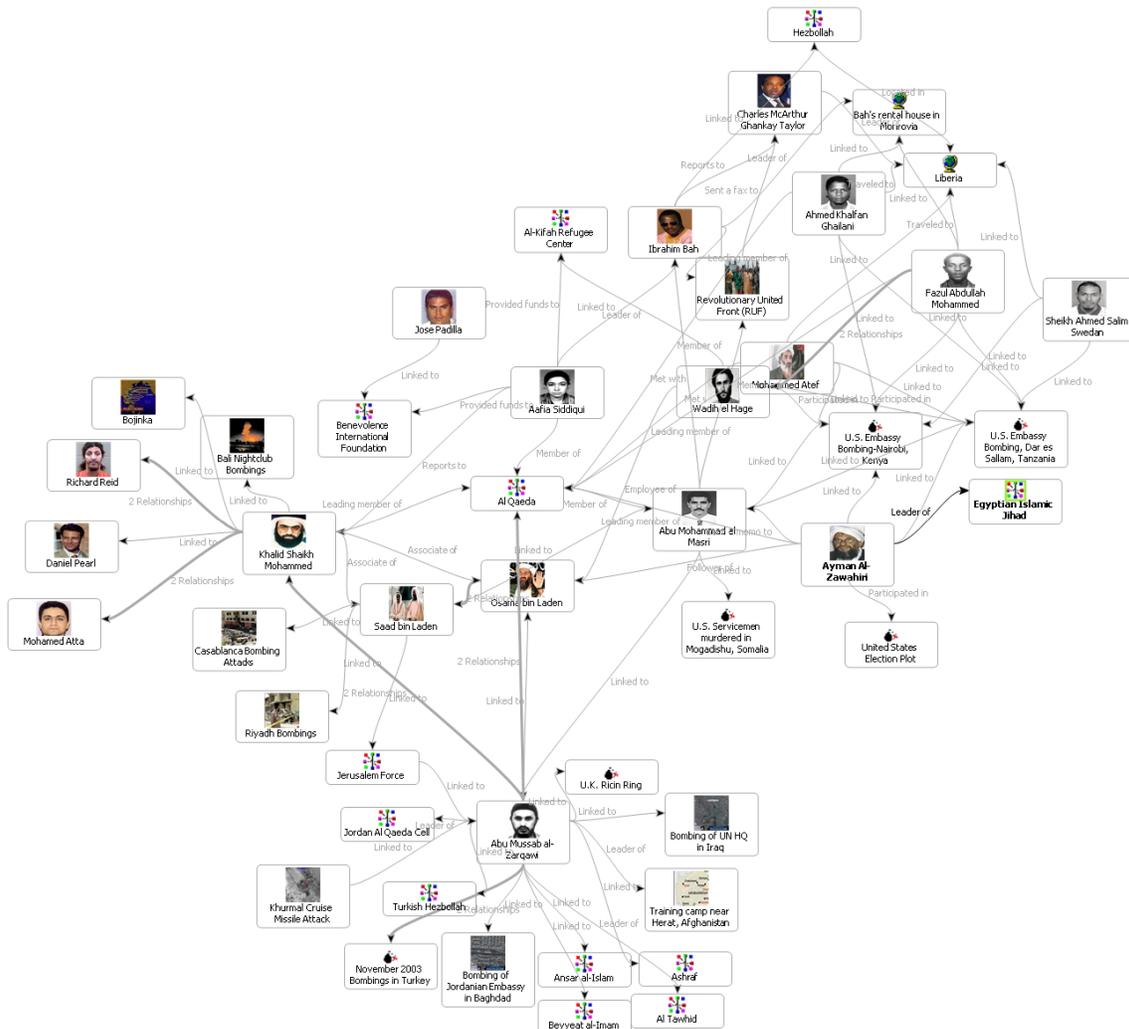


Figure 7

Note how quickly one can move from Ghailani and Mohammed to numerous terrorist kingpins (bin Laden, al-Zarqawi, al-Zawahiri), organizations (Islamic Jihad, Ansar al-Islam, Hezbollah), plots (US embassy bombings in East Africa, Bali nightclub bombing, 9/11, alleged US election plot), and well-known names (Richard Reid, Jose Padilla, Mohammed Atta, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed). Given such connections, the fact that these two men were in West Africa buying up diamonds is highly significant.

Aafia Siddiqui

Another large threat identified in the Al Qaeda diamond operation is the mysterious Aafia Siddiqui, a former MIT graduate student and allegedly Al Qaeda's only female leader. Siddiqui not only connects quickly to many of the same dangerous entities as the other two Qaeda operatives, but her financial transactions are of particular interest (Figure 8):

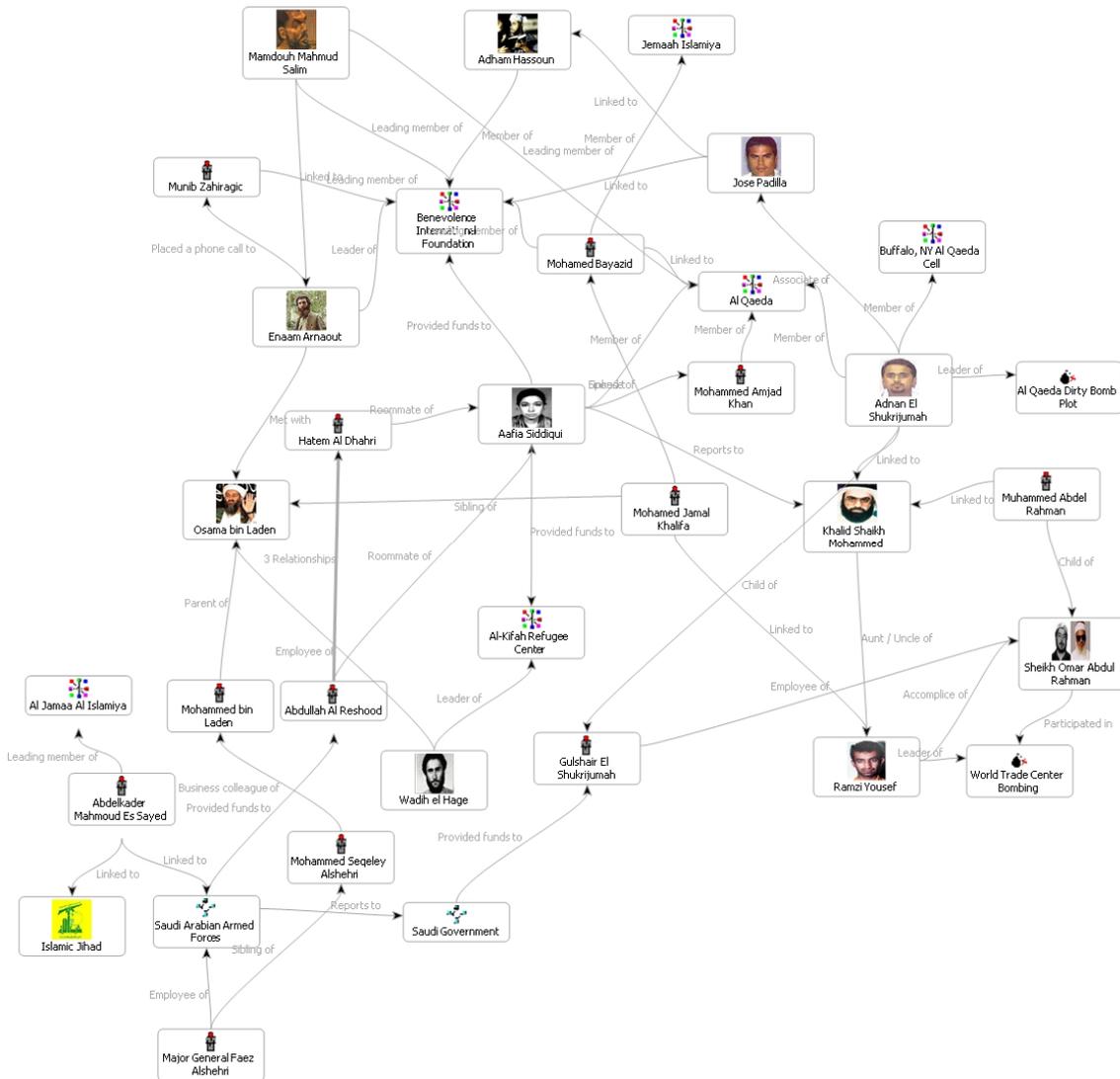


Figure 8

Figure 8 represents a complicated web of financial transactions encompassing Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups as well as the Saudi Arabian government and military. For example, the Saudi government donated money to an interpreter for one of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing masterminds. Another person linked to that plot was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Siddiqui's boss. The Saudi military also provided money to Saudi citizens who lived at the same apartment as Siddiqui, possibly as her roommates. Although one can draw no firm conclusions from these connections, they certainly suggest avenues ripe for investigation.

Conclusion

This document has just scratched the surface of the information contained in the Sentinel TMS open source database and the tools available within Sentinel TMS to analyze that information. The pictures within this document can be zoomed in or printed out if they are too fuzzy. The following links on the database's homepage provide documentation for the sketches I laid out above and a starting point for further reading:

About Sentinel TMS: <http://www.sentinelms.com>

Aziz Nassour: <http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1716.htm>

Ibrahim Bah: <http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1718.htm>

Charles Taylor: <http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1710.htm>

Fazul Abdullah Mohammed: <http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1705.htm>

Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani: <http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1703.htm>

Aafia Siddiqui: <http://www.trackingthethreat.com/content/entities/ent1729.htm>

