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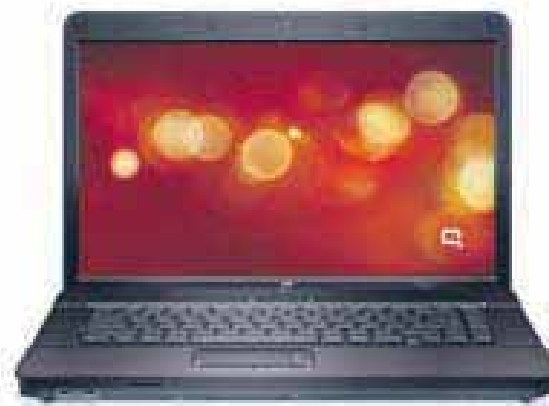
Pakistan strikes deep into al-Qa'ida territory

▶ In the mountains of Waziristan, the army claims to have recovered passports of extremists with links to the

September 11 and Madrid attackers. Does this mean they are finally closing in on Osama bin Laden himself?

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 Omar Waraich
in Sherwangai


AFTER A SWEEP of a militant stronghold in the lawless tribal region of South Waziristan, the Pakistani army has recovered passports purportedly belonging to two leading al-Qa'ida figures, including a member of the notorious Hamburg cell that orchestrated September 11.

Among a pile of documents, photographs, weapons and computers seen by *The Independent* yesterday in Waziristan, is a German passport belonging to Said Bahaji, the logistical expert of the notorious German terror cell that orchestrated the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington.

Bahaji, 34, who is of Moroccan descent, obtained the passport just days before September 11 and used it to travel to Pakistan according to the information stamped in the document.

It was not possible to verify the authenticity of the passports, nor to establish the fate of their apparent holders. If they are authentic, the documents would prove that South Waziristan, a bastion of the Pakistani Taliban, has also been a sanctuary for foreign Jihadists and key al-Qa'ida figures in Pakistan. Major General Athar Abbas, the military's chief spokesman said the documents were being made public to demonstrate the presence of foreign militants in South Waziristan which borders Afghanistan.

A Spanish passport, also recovered, purportedly belonged to Raquel Burgos Garcia. According to a student card, she is the wife of Amir Azizi, a Moroccan terrorist suspect who has been linked to both the September 11 attacks and the Madrid bombings.

The documents were apparently found after the capture of the village of Sherwangai on 20 October. The takeover came after three days of intense fighting in the dusty, barren and expansive Waziristan wilderness, at the start of an anti-Taliban offensive launched under intense political pressure from the United States. "We moved in as a battalion at night to take the terrorists by surprise," Lieutenant Colonel Inam Tarar said yesterday. As he spoke, mortar shells were being blasted into a village across a gorge nearby.

The Pakistan army would not say whether the apparent holders of the passports had been killed in the current offensive, had died earlier, or escaped. The German passport, number L 8642163, was issued in Hamburg on 2 August 2001. It matches that on an Interpol-United Nations Security Council Special notice with the exception of the first digit. The photograph in the passport matches that on the notice as well, but was not laminated.

The document indicates that Bahaji was issued with a tourist visa to Pakistan, by the Pakistani consulate in Ham-

From 9/11 to Waziristan



The evidence



■ Said Bahaji, whose passport has apparently been found in South Waziristan, left, is well known to Western intelligence agencies.

Half-German, half-Moroccan, he is believed to be an electronics and IT expert who was a key member of the so-called Hamburg Cell which laid the groundwork for the 9/11 attacks. A close associate of Mohammed Atta, the September 11 ringleader, Bahaji is also thought to have met Osama Bin Laden, above. Intelligence sources believe he travelled to Chechnya and Afghanistan and travelled to Pakistan on September 4 2001 via Turkey. Pakistani sources say there is no evidence he spent any time in Britain although intercepts show email and phone contact with individuals in the UK.

■ Raquel Burgos Garcia, left, is the wife of Amir Azizi, right, a Moroccan national who has been linked to the Madrid train bombings of 2004. She is not believed to have taken direct part in any terror activities but has been used as a courier. She is thought to be the holder of a number of other passports.

burg, valid for 90 days. On 4 September 2001, he arrived in Karachi, the passport shows. There is no sign of further travel.

Burgos Garcia, also 34, has been described in the Spanish press as having joined al-Qa'ida after a conversion to Islam. The Spanish passport, number P099823, did not bear any Pakistani stamps. Her passport was also issued just weeks before the September 11 attacks, on 1 August 2001.

The document indicates that Bahaji was issued with a tourist visa to Pak-

Iranian visa, where Azizi is reported to have fled after Spanish authorities issued an arrest warrant for him after the September 2001 attacks. There is an Indian visa, but it was apparently not used for travel.

Bahaji and Burgos Garcia have been linked to Mohammed Atta, the leader of the four hijack teams that crashed planes into New York's Twin Towers and the Pentagon in Washington. Bahaji, who may also have met Osama bin Laden, is said to have been a previous roommate of Atta's in Hamburg.

Members of the Hamburg cell which ultimately mounted the 9/11 atrocities are thought to have attended Bahaji's wedding at a Hamburg mosque in 1999. Among those present was the Lebanese hijacker, Ziad Jarrah.

Burgos Garcia's husband, Azizi, is widely suspected to have been crucial to Atta's July 2001 meeting with fellow Hamburg cell member, Ramzi Binalshibh in Spain to finalise plans for the attack. Binalshibh is a prisoner in Guantanamo Bay, and has been described by the US Office of the Director of Na-

tional Intelligence as a "key facilitator for the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001." He was captured in Karachi a year after the September 11 attacks after a shootout with Pakistani security forces.

As the army revealed the passports yesterday, Hillary Clinton issued an unusual expression of dismay at Pakistan's failure to track down members of al-Qa'ida. "I find it hard to believe that nobody in your government knows where they are and couldn't get them if they really wanted to," she said.

Students meet Clinton's charm offensive with stern resistance

 By Andrew Buncombe
in LAHORE

HILLARY CLINTON yesterday received a first-hand dose of the widespread antipathy and scepticism for the US inside Pakistan when she went head to head with students questioning the motives behind her country's foreign policy.

Protesters gathered outside the Government College University in Lahore carrying banners claiming that a US aid package to Pakistan undermined the country's sovereignty. The mood was only a little warmer inside the college as students lined up to quiz the US Secretary of State during an hour-long question and answer session.

"Whatever America is saying, we do not care," said one protester, Ahmed Shaheen, the member of a conservative Islamist students' organisation whose members gathered outside the college. "Because of the way they have behaved in the past, we would not want their aid even if it was free."

Mrs Clinton is on a mission to win over hearts and minds here as the administration of President Barack Obama seeks to reframe America's relationship with Pakistan while continuing to pressure the authorities to keep up their operation against Taliban and al-Qa'ida militants.

She is doing so with a mixture of charm and hard-headedness. Going out of her way to meet the country's senior journalists, as well as top politicians, Mrs Clinton has already won favourable headlines for her ready-to-listen manner and acknowledgement of past mistakes. At the same time, she has not hesitated from responding to blows with her own deftly-delivered counter-punches.

"I am well aware that there is a trust deficit," she said in Lahore. "My message is that's not the way it should be. We cannot let a minority of people in both countries determine our relationship."

Yet at a meeting of the city's newspaper editors, she was ready to show more steel. "I am more than willing to hear every complaint about the United States, but this is a two-way street if we are going to have a mature partnership where we work together," she said. "I find it hard to believe that nobody in your government knows where [Osama bin Laden and his senior al-Qa'ida colleagues are] and couldn't get them if they really wanted to. There are issues that not just the United States, but others have with your government and with your military security establishment."

A \$7.5bn US aid bill for Pakistan has attracted widespread criticism within the country for alleged "conditions" attached to it. The US has said these measures are simply checks to ensure the money is used correctly but many within Pakistan, in particular the military establishment, have claimed they have reduced the country to a client state of Washington.

Mrs Clinton, who wrapped herself in a bright blue headscarf as she visited the cultural capital's 16th century Badshahi mosque, claimed the Obama administration wanted a new relationship with Islamabad that differed from that of the government of George Bush. Her best laugh came when she said she spent her "entire eight years in the Senate opposing" the former president.

Yet the reality is more complex. While Mr Obama may make more noises about supporting the democratic institutions in Pakistan than his predecessor, the pressure of the US on Pakistan to strike against militants blamed for carrying out cross-border attacks in Afghanistan has not reduced. Indeed, since Mr Obama assumed office there has been a marked increase in the number of US drone strikes against suspected militant targets in Pakistan's tribal areas – a development that has led to numerous civilian casualties and widespread anger from students, journalists and protesters.

US Secretary of State
Hillary Clinton visits
the Badshahi
mosque in Lahore
yesterday REUTERS

