
Saudi added to terror list

Local charity funded Muslim fighters

**By Sam Roe
and Laurie Cohen**

Tribune staff reporters

The U.S. government on Tuesday placed on its official list of terrorist supporters a wealthy Saudi Arabian businessman who established a charity in the Chicago area to help fund Muslim fighters in some of the world's most volatile areas.

The Treasury Department said Adel Batterjee "has ranked

as one of the world's foremost terrorist financiers" by helping bankroll Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. The department froze his U.S. assets and said it would ask the United Nations to require that other countries do the same.

"A worldwide asset freeze, including in his home country of Saudi Arabia, will deal a serious blow to this key terrorist facilitator," said Stuart Levey, a high-ranking Treasury official.



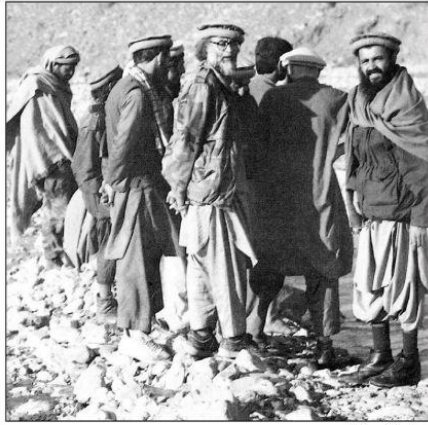
Batterjee

The U.S. also designated as a terrorist supporter Saad al-Faqih, a leading Saudi dissident in London who has called for the overthrow of the Saudi royal family. Treasury officials said that Batterjee and al-Faqih were not linked.

Batterjee's life story was de-

PLEASE SEE **TERROR**, PAGE 22

FROM PAGE ONE



Tribune file photo

Adel Batterjee (center), shown in a photo taken from his book "Conquest and Defeat," has financed Muslim fighters in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya and Sudan.

TERROR: Saudi's book denounced the West

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tailed for the first time by the Tribune in February as part of its yearlong series "Struggle for the soul of Islam." A 59-year-old living in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, Batterjee was intimately involved in jihad, or holy war, for two decades, financing Muslim fighters in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya and Sudan.

Various government and court documents show that he was a hands-on financier who inspected troops and was kept abreast of mundane matters, such as whether recruits had warm coats. He once even hand-picked fighters for battle.

Reached by telephone in Saudi Arabia, Batterjee said he was unaware of the Treasury Department's actions and declined to comment further.

In a book published in 2002, he wrote that "the pinnacle of Islam" is jihad, which he defined as the use of force for religious purposes. He stated that the West is morally bankrupt and that its war on terrorism is just an excuse to try to stop Muslims from spreading Islam.

Adel Al-Jubeir, spokesman for Crown Prince Abdullah, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, told the Tribune earlier this year that the kingdom had investigated Batterjee and found nothing improper. "Why do you want us to convict someone who you ... don't have evidence on?" he asked at the time. He could not be reached Tuesday.

Saudi reaction

A Saudi spokesman in Washington, who requested anonymity, said the kingdom would abide by any future UN decision on the matter. Late Tuesday, The Associated Press reported Saudi Arabia joined the U.S. in asking the UN to impose sanctions on Batterjee.

Batterjee has long been of interest to U.S. law-enforcement officials, but efforts to investigate him were largely unsuccessful before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. A report this year by the independent Sept. 11 commission said FBI agents sought information about Batterjee through the bureau's legal attache in Saudi Arabia in 1999.

"As of 9/11 they still had received no response," the report stated.

Batterjee's jihad efforts were financed in part by his charity, Benevolence International Foundation, which opened a U.S. office in suburban Palos Hills in the early 1990s. Many donors gave money to the Palos Hills office, which in turn aided Islamic fighters.

The Saudi financier's right-hand man, Enaam Arnaout, ran the office until federal agents raided it in December 2001. Arnaout, a native of Syria, was charged with aiding terrorists and defrauding donors. The Treasury Department froze the

charity's assets and designated it a terrorist supporter.

But in a blow to the government's war on terrorism, a judge made several rulings that indicated the case was not going in the prosecution's favor. Arnaout eventually cut a deal and pleaded guilty to defrauding donors, and the terrorism charges were dropped. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Batterjee was an unindicted co-conspirator in that case. U.S. Atty. Patrick Fitzgerald, who personally tried the case, has declined to say why he did not go after Batterjee.

In announcing its actions Tuesday, the Treasury Department did not disclose new evidence against Batterjee. The department's news release mirrored statements previously made by prosecutors.

Treasury spokeswoman Molly Millerwise would not say why the department decided to list Batterjee now. "Our timing is the result of balancing strategic, tactical and diplomatic considerations, to determine the most effective time for a public designation," she said.

Noted terrorism expert Rita Katz suggested that U.S. officials did not previously list Batterjee because they could not secure Saudi backing. "I think they needed Saudi support, and now it seems to be in place," she said.

When the Treasury spokeswoman was asked whether it was fair to freeze Batterjee's assets when the U.S. has been unable to make a criminal case against him, Millerwise referred the inquiry to Justice Department officials. The U.S. attorney's office in Chicago would not comment.

Batterjee is one of a handful of Saudis designated a terrorist supporter by the Treasury Department. The agency's allegations against Batterjee include that his charity in the 1980s aided fighters in Afghanistan associated with bin Laden and fundamentalist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

U.S. also backed fighters

But the U.S. government also supported Islamic fighters in Afghanistan at this time as the nation was at war with Soviet forces that had invaded the country. And America aided Hekmatyar in the Afghan civil war that followed.

Later, Batterjee's charity assisted fighters in Bosnia, Chechnya and Sudan. At one point, bin Laden told an associate that Batterjee's charity was helping finance Al Qaeda, the Treasury announcement states.

After Sept. 11, searches of the charity's Bosnia offices uncovered a purported list of donors and fundraisers for Afghan fighters. The name appearing most on the list of fundraisers was bin Laden. Next was Batterjee.

The other man whom the Treasury Department designated a terrorist supporter, al-Faqih, heads the London-based Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, the best-known Saudi opposition group.

Tribune staff reporter Stephen Franklin contributed to this report.