

buildings adjacent to the embassy and found ways to safeguard the streets. We could remain in an urban area and feel safe.

Al-Qaeda made its way back onto the front page a few months after our trip when, on October 12, 2000, it blew up the USS *Cole*, killing seventeen sailors and injuring thirty-nine more. The FBI and the military briefly investigated, Congress held a hearing, and the media moved on.

In January 2001 I was called to testify in the case of *USA v. Usama bin Laden*. The assistant U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, Patrick Fitzgerald, had issued an indictment against twenty-one people for the bombings of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and four of them were on trial:

Wadih el-Hage, the Lebanese American administrative head of the al-Qaeda branch in Nairobi, was charged with perjury. Twice he had lied to a grand jury, both before and after the bombings. Had el-Hage told the truth in 1997, the prosecution alleged, the bombings would never have taken place.

Mohammed Saddiq Odeh, who lived on the coast of Kenya, was charged with participating in mass murder and helping to construct the bombs that went into the trucks in both Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-Owhali, who hurled the stun grenade outside the embassy in Nairobi just before his companion detonated the truckload of explosives, was also charged with participating in mass murder.

Khalfan Khamis Mohamed was charged with providing the logistical support necessary to carry out the attack on the embassy in Dar es Salaam.

The trial began with a range of conspiracy charges, and the prosecution spent days putting al-Qaeda insiders and other experts on the stand to tell the story. Bin Laden ran an international network of terrorist groups capable of carrying out attacks even in the face of operational failures. He managed al-Qaeda through a *shura* council of advisors, which he headed. He had an international financial system to move money and used state-of-the-art

technology to issue orders. He had operated with impunity for five years from Sudan, where the government had given him special privileges. He had interacted with the government of Iran, and its proxy military organization, Hezbollah, had trained al-Qaeda operatives to blow up buildings. Bin Laden had personally chosen the embassy in Nairobi as a target because it was accessible, it housed the U.S. embassy to Sudan, and it was headed by a female ambassador whose death would provoke more media attention.

Bin Laden was connected to the attack on U.S. soldiers in Somalia in 1993, an attempted purchase of chemical weapons in 1994, the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1995, and the bombings of the two U.S. embassies in 1998. Al-Qaeda cells were still operative in Brooklyn, New York; Orlando, Florida; Dallas, Texas; Santa Clara, California; Columbia, Missouri; and Herndon, Virginia.

In a large, frigid file room at the rear of a New York City federal courthouse, the survivors of the East Africa bombings who were summoned as witnesses waited for days for their turn to testify about the attack itself. Most had received only hours' notice to get their lives in order before they were whisked to the bitter cold of the Big Apple. They were provided with donated heavier clothing at the airport by a solicitous Witness Task Force, but gratitude was morphing into frustration as day after day passed in the dreary storeroom. The tension was contagious.

I was lucky. I was only coming from Guatemala, less than a day's trip away, and Richard was with me. I had to wait only three gray days, but it proved to be plenty of time to relive events, absorb lingering anger, and witness the pain many still experienced.

I heard nothing from the State Department until late at night before the morning I was to testify. At first I thought someone had actually remembered and wanted to wish me well as the first witness in this phase of the trial. No, the lawyer was calling to remind me that under no condition was I to reveal classified information in court. I almost threw the phone across the room. By the time I was called to the stand the next day, I was mentally fatigued and physically tense.

Judge Leonard Sand dominated the crowded, wood-paneled courtroom in a black judicial robe. Gray computer monitors, their

cables snaking across the floor, almost hid the jury—all but their faces, which looked alert and interested. The four dark-haired, bearded defendants in traditional Muslim garb of neutral shades sat facing the judge, surrounded by lawyers in their traditional garb of dark suits. Everything about the place appeared sober. The jury looked serious, the judge imposing, and the defendants bored. Behind the brown-slatted bar that separated the gallery from the rest of the courtroom, spectators, journalists, and some families of al-Qaeda’s victims quietly observed this case of mass murder.

The prosecution and defense attorneys asked me open-ended questions with deference. Then a defense attorney asked about the many antennae on the roof of the old embassy, and Judge Sand snapped, “Don’t answer that.” The lawyer tried to rephrase the question, and Sand interrupted. “Counsels, in my chamber.” Just like on TV.

For the next few minutes and forever, I faced some of our murderers, who were staring intently at their computer monitors. Al-Owhali, who had thrown the grenade that brought so many thousands to their windows, continued to pick his teeth, as he had been doing while I spoke. I was delighted to be dismissed from the stand shortly after the judge returned.

Former colleagues and neighbors from Nairobi followed me as witnesses. George Mimba had found himself buried under bodies, Sammy Nganga under piles of stone rubble. Frank Pressley had lost part of his jaw and a large section of his shoulder. Moses Kinyua and Elijah Mutie Mue would wear disfiguring facial scars forever. Tobias Otieno, Peninah Mutioho, and Caroline Ngugi were blinded. Father John Kiongo Kariuki had seen his brother and niece blown up.

Caroline Gichuru described being blown from her chair and blinded by blood, stumbling toward the daylight that had replaced the concrete exterior wall of her office. Only loud warnings from shocked onlookers stopped her from tumbling into the concrete wreckage two stories below. Marine Sgt. Daniel Briehl testified to falling down an elevator shaft and going to the hospital; he left out the fact that he had returned to the old embassy, ignoring his injuries, to rescue others, an act that won him the Purple Heart.

Horrifying testimonies in and of themselves, they represented only a tiny sample of the stories and injuries that more than 5,000 Kenyans could describe. The last of these witnesses, Dr. Gretchen McCoy, described the bloody chaos outside the embassy and the desperate efforts to help the wounded at a local hospital. The litany of horrors ended when the names of the 224 Kenyans and Tanzanians killed by the bombings were read into the record.

Before I left the courthouse, Patrick Fitzgerald invited Richard and me to meet his boss, Mary Jo White. In her office, the two launched into a strange and abstract apology that “the wall” had prevented them from doing more before the bombing took place. I had no idea what they were talking about and lamely suggested that they review their procedures. Even Richard, a criminal defense and civil rights attorney before Foreign Service days, did not understand.

That night, all of us witnesses were given a special night tour of the Statue of Liberty. The boat ride was icy cold, the view of the Twin Towers and other landmarks crystal clear. It felt extraordinary to share this with other survivors. New York City looked pristine and innocent, untouched by the evil that had changed so many lives so far away. I returned to Guatemala’s sunshine with relief.

In August Richard and I flew to Nairobi for the opening of the August 7th Memorial Park on the corner of Moi and Haile Selassie Avenues. Was this really the site of the old embassy chancery—it seemed so green, even peaceful. The brown concrete box that was our workplace was gone, and so was the seven-story Ufundi House next door. The high-rise Cooperative Bank Building that I thought would become my tomb looked the same, only spiffier, with new windows and scrubbed walls courtesy of the U.S. government.

Then I heard a tinny voice screeching hymns into a scratchy microphone on the corner close to the train station. For two years I had heard that same voice from my office every day around noon, and for a second I was transported. The violent fireball had not consumed us; life was normal; I was back in 1998 explaining to the foreign minister that the White House had agreed to a “pull-aside”—a short, informal conversation—between President Moi