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U.S.-born and educated Anwar al-Awlaki turned against the West after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Drones quiet U.S.-born cleric whose words inspired jihad

BY JOBY WARRICK
The Washington Post

He was al-Qaida's pious piper, a gifted writer and preacher whose words were a call to violent jihad for young Muslims worldwide. While never known to fire a shot,

CRITICS QUESTION legality of killing, but most members of cleric's former mosque in Virginia are glad to see him gone > A4

Anwar al-Awlaki was linked to more plots against U.S. and other Western targets than Osama bin Laden in the past five years.

The U.S.-born Muslim cleric was linked to the 2009 Fort Hood, Texas, shooting rampage that killed 13 people and last year's

foiled attempt to put bombs on U.S.-bound cargo planes. His words led a Nigerian to attempt to blow up a jetliner over Detroit on Christmas 2009 and inspired an unemployed Pakistani to drive a

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instruction: fighting the devil doesn't require consultation or prayers," he said.

So effective was his message that the CIA put him on a target list, making him the first U.S. citizen designated for death, wherever found, without judicial process.

The search for the Las Cruces, N.M.-born al-Awlaki, 40, ended Friday. After days of surveillance, CIA-operated drones from a new U.S. base in the Arabian Peninsula crossed into northern Yemen and unleashed a barrage of Hellfire missiles at a car carrying him and other top operatives from an al-Qaida branch in Yemen.

Samir Khan, 25, another American, who had run the group's English-language online magazine, Inspire, also was killed. The U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin, who grew up in Queens and North Carolina, proclaimed in his publication last year that he was "proud to be a traitor to America" and edited articles with titles such as "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom."

U.S. officials said the strike also may have killed Ibrahim Hassan al-Asiri, a Saudi

Sources: CIA World Factbook, Reuters, BBC

The strike, the culmination of a manhunt marked by near misses and dead ends, represented the latest killing of a senior terrorist figure in an escalated campaign by the Obama administration.

"The death of Awlaki is a major blow to al-Qaida's most active operational affiliate," President Obama said at a swearing-in ceremony for the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey.

Obama called al-Awlaki "the leader of external operations for al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula," the first time a U.S. official has publicly described him that way.

A high-ranking Yemeni security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, placed the attack on al-Awlaki's convoy between Marib and Jawf provinces.

"He was one of a kind," said Jarret Brachman, a counterterrorism expert and consultant on al-Qaida for government agencies and private companies. "His message was so accessible, so en-

Laden in May, some terrorism experts looked to al-Awlaki as a possible new global leader of al-Qaida. It was an unlikely role for a man who lived his formative years in the United States and once was regarded as a voice of moderate, tolerant Islam.

Born while his Yemeni father was attending New Mexico State University on Fulbright scholarship, al-Awlaki spent his first seven years in the United States, moved to Yemen with his family and returned to study civil engineering at Colorado State University.

He then studied education at San Diego State University and later did doctoral work at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

In San Diego, he preached at a mosque — and at one point was arrested on charges of solicitation of prostitution. He was investigated by the FBI in 1999 and 2000, although no criminal charges were filed. He met two of the Sept. 11 hijackers, Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaf