

Operation Ababil

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Operation Ababil was a series of [cyber attacks](#) starting in 2012, targeting various American financial institutions and carried out by a group calling itself the "Cyber fighters of Izz Ad-Din Al Qassam".

The cyber attacks, or more specifically [denial of service attacks](#), were launched by the Cyber fighters of Izz Ad-Din Al Qassam also known as Qassam Cyber Fighters. The group announced^[1] the attacks on September 18, 2012 on [Pastebin](#) where they criticized [Israel](#) and the United States and justified the attacks as a response to the [Innocence of Muslims](#) video released by controversial American pastor [Terry Jones](#). Their targets included the [New York Stock Exchange](#) as well as a number of banks including [J.P. Morgan Chase](#).^[2] The result of the attacks was a limited disruption of the targeted websites. The attacks ended on Oct 23, 2012 because of the Eid al-Adha holiday^[3] at which point they offered to speak to the media through e-mail.

Name of the group and operation

[\[edit\]](#)

The group's moniker, [Izz ad-Din al-Qassam](#), was a Muslim preacher who lead in the fight against British, French and Jewish nationalist organizations in the Levant in the 1920s and 1930s.

Disputed origins of attacks

[\[edit\]](#)

On September 21, 2012, the [Washington Post](#) reported^[4] that the attacks originated not from a [hactivist](#) group but from the [government of Iran](#) and cited U.S. Senator [Joseph I. Lieberman](#) as one who was a proponent of this idea. Lieberman told C-Span that he believed the Iranian government was sponsoring the group's attacks on US banks in retaliation for Western economic sanctions.^[5] An early report by [Dancho Danchev](#) found the amateurish "outdated and virtually irrelevant technical skills" of the attack suspicious.^[6] But Michael Smith, senior security evangelist at Akamai, found the size of the attacks—65 gigabits of traffic per second—more consistent with a state actor (such as Iran) than with a typical hactivist denial of service attack which would be less than 2 gigabits/second.^[7]

The controversial hactivist, [The Jester](#), claimed the Qassam Cyber Fighters had help with their attacks from the hacking group [Anonymous](#).^[8]

On December 10, 2012, the Qassam Cyber Fighters announced^[9] the launching of phase two of Operation Ababil. In that statement, they specifically named [U.S. Bancorp](#), J.P. Morgan Chase, [Bank of America](#), [PNC Financial Services](#) and [SunTrust Bank](#) as targets and identified events such as [Hurricane Sandy](#) and the [2012 US Presidential Election](#) as reasons for the delay of phase two. This announcement also mentioned disrespect towards the [Prophet Mohammed](#) as motivation and denied the involvement of any [nation state](#). It was during this time that media attention increased with one journalist observing,^[10] "Operation Ababil stands out for its sophistication and focus, experts say." and allegations of involvement by Iran also increased.^[11] On January 29, 2013, an announcement^[12] was made that phase two would come to a conclusion due to the removal of the main copy of the video from YouTube. The announcement also identified additional copies of the movie also hosted on [YouTube](#).

On February 12, 2013, the Qassam Cyber Fighters issued a warning^[13] that the other copies of the movie referenced in their January 29 posting should be removed. They followed this with a "serious warning"^[14] and then an "ultimatum"^[15] after the additional copies of the video were not removed. On March 5, 2013, they announced^[16] the beginning of Phase 3 of Operation Ababil on their Pastebin page. This was followed by several of the financial institutions on their target list reporting website disruptions.^[17]

- [Cyberwarfare in the United States](#)
- [Prolexic](#)
- [Alexander Heid](#)
- [Chase Bank](#)
- [DDOS](#)

1. [^ "Bank of America and New York Stock Exchange under attack"](#). Retrieved February 10, 2013.
2. [^ "Chase, NYSE Websites Targeted in Cyber Attacks"](#). *Fox Business*. Archived from [the original](#) on October 19, 2012. Retrieved February 10, 2013.
3. [^ "The 6th Week, Operation Ababil"](#). Retrieved February 11, 2013.
4. [^ Nakashima, Ellen \(September 21, 2012\). "Iran blamed for cyberattacks on U.S. banks and companies"](#). *The Washington Post*. Archived from [the original](#) on June 20, 2013. Retrieved February 10, 2013.
5. [^ "Deconstructing the Al-Qassam Cyber Fighters Assault on US Banks"](#). 2 January 2013. Analysis Intelligence. Archived from [the original](#) on June 16, 2019. Retrieved September 19, 2013.
6. [^ Danchev, Dancho \(September 28, 2012\). "Dissecting 'Operation Ababil' - an OSINT Analysis"](#). September 28, 2012. Retrieved September 19, 2013.
7. [^ Gonsalves, Antone. "Bank attackers more sophisticated than typical hacktivists, expert says"](#). September 28, 2012. *CSO*. Retrieved September 19, 2013.
8. [^ "The Jester: Anonymous Hackers Helped Izz ad-Din al-Qassam DDOS US Banks"](#). Retrieved February 11, 2013.
9. [^ "Phase 2 Operation Ababil"](#). Retrieved February 11, 2013.
10. [^ "Group halts bank cyberattacks"](#). *Star Tribune*. Retrieved February 11, 2013.
11. [^ Shachtman, Noah \(November 27, 2012\). "Bank Hackers Deny They're Agents of Iran"](#). *Wired*. Retrieved February 11, 2013.
12. [^ "Operation Ababil Suspended due to removal of insulting movie"](#). Retrieved March 17, 2013.

13. [^](#) *"[Warning, Operation Ababil](#)". Retrieved March 17, 2013.*
 14. [^](#) *"[Serious Warning, Operation Ababil](#)". Retrieved March 17, 2013.*
 15. [^](#) *"[Operation Ababil, AIQASSAM ULTIMATUM](#)". Archived from [the original](#) on February 17, 2017. Retrieved March 17, 2013.*
 16. [^](#) *"[Phase 3, Operation Ababil](#)". Retrieved March 17, 2013.*
 17. [^](#) *"[Bank Attackers Restart Operation Ababil DDoS Disruptions](#)". Retrieved March 17, 2013.*
- [Qassam Cyber Fighters Pastebin page](#)

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