

Cynthia L Rapp

From: Cynthia L Rapp
Sent: Thursday, March 15, 2012 4:22 PM
To: [redacted]
Subject: Draft RE: Ignatius column this weekend on documents from UBL raid

(b)(3)

I was not aware; I hope CTC was.

From: [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, March 15, 2012 4:20 PM
To: Media
Subject: FW: Ignatius column this weekend on documents from UBL raid

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Did we know this effort was underway? We probably need to inform CTC.

From: Vietor, Tommy [mailto:[redacted]]
Sent: Thursday, March 15, 2012 4:10 PM
To: Wilson, Douglas HON OSD PA; Little, George CIV OSD PA; 'Kirby, John F CAPT OSD PA'; Hammer, Michael A; nulandvj@state.gov; 'tonerm@state.gov' (tonerm@state.gov); Shawn S Turner; Cynthia L Rapp; [redacted]
Cc: Hayden, Caitlin; Bradsher, Tanya; Pelton, Erin
Subject: Ignatius column this weekend on documents from UBL raid

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(b)(5)
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Team,

As you probably know, our CT folks have been working for months with the IC to declassify and analyze documents taken from UBL's compound. They have organized some of the documents thematically for use with press where they could provide a strategic communications benefit. Ultimately, the plan is for all the documents to be hosted by an academic institution for journalists/researchers to study.

The first such collection is called "Al-Qaida's Weaknesses, Internal Disputes, and Bin Ladin's Views". That material was exclusively reviewed this week by David Ignatius. He has secured essentially half of the Washington Post's Sunday editorial page for a 1,200 word column on the subject, and a shorter version (750 words) of his syndicated column will be disseminated globally.

The column will paint a picture of a fractured, weakened AQ core, and a hunkered down, brooding UBL cut off from his organization by our CT efforts.

Some logistical flags – because Ignatius's column is disseminated globally, its very possible that his affiliate papers will put it up during the day tomorrow.

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[redacted]

We will send you guys the background TPs ASAP.

Best,

Tommy

Cynthia L Rapp

From: Cynthia L Rapp
Sent: Friday, March 16, 2012, 11:59 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Ignatius column is out

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Washington Post

The bin Laden plot to kill President Obama

By David Ignatius, Friday, March 16, 10:58 AM

Before his death, Osama bin Laden boldly commanded his network to organize special cells in Afghanistan and Pakistan to attack the aircraft of President Barack Obama and Gen. David Petraeus.

“The reason for concentrating on them,” the al-Qaeda leader explained to his top lieutenant, “is that Obama is the head of infidelity and killing him automatically will make (Vice President Joe) Biden take over the presidency. ... Biden is totally unprepared for that post, which will lead the U.S. into a crisis. As for Petraeus, he is the man of the hour ... and killing him would alter the war’s path” in Afghanistan.

Administration officials said Friday the Obama-Petraeus plot was never a serious threat.

The scheme is described in one of the documents taken from bin Laden’s compound by U.S. forces on May 2, the night he was killed. I was given an exclusive look at some of these remarkable documents by a senior administration official. They have been declassified and will be available soon to the public in their original Arabic texts and translations.

The man bin Laden hoped would carry out the attacks on Obama and Petraeus was the Pakistani terrorist Ilyas Kashmiri. “Please ask brother Ilyas to send me the steps he has taken into that work,” bin Laden wrote to his top lieutenant, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman. A month after bin Laden’s death, Kashmiri was killed in a U.S. drone attack.

The plot to target Obama was probably bluster, since al-Qaeda apparently lacked the weapons to shoot down U.S. aircraft. But it’s a chilling reminder that even when he was embattled and in hiding, bin Laden still dreamed of pulling off another spectacular terrorist attack against the United States.

The terrorist leader urged in a 48-page directive to Atiyah to focus “every effort that could be spent on attacks in America,” instead of operations within Muslim nations. He told Atiyah to “ask the brothers in all regions if they have a brother ... who can operate in the U.S. [He should be able to] live there, or it should be easy for him to travel there.”

U.S. analysts don’t see evidence that these plots have materialized. “The organization lacks the ability to plan, organize and execute complex, catastrophic attacks, but the threat persists,” says a senior administration analyst who has carefully reviewed the documents.

The bin Laden who emerges from these communications is a terrorist CEO in an isolated compound, brooding that his organization has ruined its reputation by killing too many Muslims in its jihad against America. He writes of the many departed “brothers” who have been lost to U.S. drone attacks. But he’s far from the battlefield himself in his hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan, where he seems to spend considerable time watching television.

The garbled syntax of Bin Laden’s communications may result from their being dictated to several of his wives, according to the U.S. analyst. And his rambling laundry list of recommendations illustrates the problems of communicating with subordinates when it could take several months to receive an answer. The al-Qaeda leader had a “great fear of irrelevance,” the analyst believes.

Because of constant harassment and communications difficulties in Pakistan’s tribal areas, bin Laden encouraged al-Qaeda leaders to leave north and south Waziristan for more distant and remote locations.

Bin Laden had an unlikely managerial focus, for such a notorious terrorist. He discusses the need for “deputy emirs” and “acting emirs” to run regional operations when the local boss is away, and he suggests that emirs should serve two-year terms and write an “annual report to be sent to the central group detailing the local situation.” He allowed a relatively frank exchange with his subordinates, who voiced criticisms about the organization’s errors.

Though open to internal debate, bin Laden and his aides had rigid views about Muslim theology. Atiyah sent his leader a strident letter in June 2009 detailing what he saw as doctrinal errors among other jihadists.

Bin Laden’s biggest concern was al-Qaeda’s media image among Muslims. He worried that it was so tarnished that, in a draft letter probably intended for Atiyah, he argued that the organization should find a new name.

The al-Qaeda brand had become a problem, Bin Laden explained, because Obama administration officials “have largely stopped using the phrase ‘the war on terror’ in the context of not wanting to provoke Muslims,” and instead promoted a war against al-Qaeda. The organization’s full name was “Qaeda al-Jihad,” bin Laden noted, but in its shorthand version, “this name reduces the feeling of Muslims that we belong to them.” He proposed 10 alternatives “that would not easily be shortened to a word that does not represent us.” His first recommendation was “Taifat al-tawhid wal-jihad,” or Monotheism and Jihad Group.

Bin Laden ruminated about “mistakes” and “miscalculations” by affiliates in Iraq and elsewhere that had killed Muslims, even in mosques. He told Atiyah to warn every emir, or regional leader, to avoid these “unnecessary civilian casualties,” which were hurting the organization.

“Making these mistakes is a great issue,” he stressed, arguing that spilling “Muslim blood” had resulted in “the alienation of most of the nation [of Islam] from the Mujahidin.” Local al-Qaeda leaders should “apologize and be held responsible for what happened.”

Bin Laden also criticized subordinates for linking their operations to local grievances rather than the overarching Muslim cause of Palestine. He chided his affiliate in Yemen for saying an operation was a response to U.S. bombing there. He even scolded the organizers of the spectacular December 2009 suicide attack on the CIA base in Khost, Afghanistan, for describing it as revenge for the killing of Pakistani Taliban leader Beitullah Mehsud. “It was necessary to discuss Palestine first,” lectured bin Laden.

Bin Laden’s focus on attacking the U.S. homeland led to sharp disagreements with his deputy, Ayman Al Zawahiri, who favored easier and more opportunistic attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and other areas.

Bin Laden told Atiyah that al-Qaeda's best chance for establishing an Islamic state was Yemen, which he described as the "launching point" for attacks on the Persian Gulf oil states. "Control of these nations means control of the world," he wrote. But he worried that the push in Yemen would come too soon and advised his colleagues to wait three years, if necessary, before making a decisive move. By fighting too hard in Syria in the early 1980s, he noted, the Muslim Brotherhood "lost a generation of men."

Bin Laden and his aides hoped for big terrorist operations to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001. They also had elaborate media plans. Adam Gadahn, a U.S.-born media adviser, even discussed in a message to his boss what would be the best television outlets for a bin Laden anniversary video.

"It should be sent for example to ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN and maybe PBS and VOA. As for Fox News let her die in her anger," Gadahn wrote. At another point, he said of the networks: "From a professional point of view, they are all on one level — except (Fox News) channel, which falls into the abyss as you know, and lacks objectivity, too."

What an unintended boost for Fox, which can now boast that it is al-Qaeda's least favorite network.

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