

# WAS IT NSA OR A YEMENI “ALLY” LEAKING THE “CLEAR ORDERS” FROM ZAWAHIRI TO WUHAYSHI?

Apparently, it wasn't enough for someone to leak this information to the NYT (which said that it withheld some information at the request from the government).

The United States intercepted electronic communications this week among senior operatives of Al Qaeda, in which the terrorists discussed attacks against American interests in the Middle East and North Africa, American officials said Friday.

The intercepts and a subsequent analysis of them by American intelligence agencies prompted the United States to issue an unusual global travel alert to American citizens on Friday, warning of the potential for terrorist attacks by operatives of Al Qaeda and their associates beginning Sunday through the end of August.

Then someone apparently in Sanaa leaked this to McClatchy.

An official who'd been briefed on the matter in Sanaa, the Yemeni capital, told McClatchy that the embassy closings and travel advisory were the result of an intercepted communication between Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the head of the Yemen-based Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, and al Qaida leader Ayman al Zawahiri in which Zawahiri gave “clear orders” to al-Wuhaysi, who was recently named al Qaida's general manager, to

carry out an attack.

The official, however, said he could not divulge details of the plot. AQAP's last major attack in Sanaa took place in May 2012 when a suicide bomber killed more than 100 military cadets at a rehearsal for a military parade. [my emphasis]

Which the WaPo has now reported too.

Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri ordered the head of the terrorist group's Yemen affiliate to carry out an attack, according to intercepted communications that have led to the closure of U.S. embassies and a global travel alert, said a person briefed on the case.

In one communication, Zawahiri, who succeeded Osama bin Laden, gave "clear orders" to Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the founder of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, to undertake an attack, the source said. McClatchy newspapers first reported the exchange on Sunday. [my emphasis]

In a follow-up story, McClatchy attributes their information to a Yemeni official.

U.S. officials have been secretive about what precise information led to the worldwide travel advisory and embassy closings, but a Yemeni official told McClatchy on Sunday that authorities had intercepted "clear orders" from al Qaida leader Ayman Zawahiri to Nasir al Wuhayshi, the head of the affiliate in Yemen, to carry out an attack.

Remember, Saudis and Yemeni sources have a well-established history of leaking sensitive intelligence about our thwarted plots. But in this case, the original source (to the NYT)

seems to be American, with a Yemeni first providing the really remarkable level of detail.

And thus far, no one from the government has called for the NYT, McClatchy, and WaPo sources to be jailed. How ... telling.

Perhaps just as interesting, the US has used a C-17 to evacuate what State is calling emergency personnel from Yemen.

Pentagon officials said a U.S. Air Force C-17 transport plane carrying some American government personnel had taken off from Yemen. They said the State Department had ordered non-essential personnel to leave the country.

An unknown number of U.S. Embassy personnel remain in Sanaa.

Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said the Defense Department "continues to have personnel on the ground in Yemen to support the U.S. State Department and monitor the security situation."

But someone wants Andrea Mitchell not to report this as an evacuation; whatever it is, almost 100 people have been, um, evacuated.

Are these "emergency personnel" people whose identity has been leaked?

Now, as a threshold level, the news that the US has collections of whatever presumably well-protected communication channel exist(ed) between Zawahiri and Wuhayshi sure seems to undermine government claims that Edward Snowden has ruined their collections, given that two of our very sharpest targets are still using communications accessible to US targeting.

Consider one more thing. If our collections are that good that we have a bead on either Zawahiri or Wuhayshi, why don't we have their location?

We've launched 4 drone strikes in 10 days in Yemen. If we did have means of intercepting

Wuhayshi's communications and are clearly on a drone strike binge, then what does it mean that sources – including at least one Yemeni official – are leaking news that we have those intercepts?

Update: And here's Michael Hayden, who for weeks has been arguing that Edward Snowden should be made an example of, suggesting this alert is good because it lets the bad guys know we're onto them.

“The announcement itself may also be designed to interrupt Al Qaeda planning, to put them off stride,” Michael V. Hayden, a former C.I.A. director, said on “Fox News Sunday.” “To put them on the back foot, to let them know that we're alert and that we're on at least to a portion of this plotline.”