

ABDULELAH HAIDER SHAYE AND ANWAR AL-AWLAKI'S EMAILS

Al-Jazeera did another long piece on the imprisonment of Abdulelah Haider Shaye, whose story Jeremy Scahill first covered here. There are two details worth note. First, just after 15:40, AJE describes the White House's non-denial denial of their involvement with Shaye's continued imprisonment.

Well, we got in touch with the White House on this last week, and this is what we were told: "The President's comments have absolutely nothing to do with Shaye's reporting or his criticism of Yemen or the United States. A Yemeni court, not a US court, convicted him."

It's an odd comment because if, as alleged, Shaye's imprisonment has something to do with being an AQAP propagandist, then it would have to do with his journalism. Furthermore, given the language the White House itself included in its readout of the February 2, 2011 conversation between President Obama and Ali Abdullah Saleh...

President Obama called President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen on February 2 to welcome the significant reform measures that President Saleh had announced earlier that day, and to stress that President Saleh now needs to follow-up his pledge with concrete actions. President Obama asked that Yemeni security forces show restraint and refrain from violence against Yemeni demonstrators who are exercising their right to free association, assembly, and speech. The President also told President Saleh that it is imperative that Yemen take forceful action against Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

to protect innocent lives in Yemen as well as abroad. Finally, President Obama expressed concern over the release of Abd-Ilah al-Shai, who had been sentenced to five years in prison for his association with AQAP. President Saleh thanked the President for U.S. support and committed to continuing and strengthening relations with the United States. [my emphasis]

... It's quite clear that regardless of whose courts convicted Shaye, Obama's comments played a key role in his continued imprisonment.

The irony? In the same conversation Obama pressured Saleh to show restraint with Yemenis exercising their right to speech. So now the White House is issuing non-denial denials about a conversation in which they criticized Saleh for his violent repression by attributing responsibility to Yemen's legal system?

Nevertheless, I find it significant that, rather than offer some explanation for Obama's pressure to keep Shaye imprisoned, the White House is now dodging the issue.

Particularly given this detail Scahill reveals just after 20:00.

What I'm going to say right now about it is the extent of what I can say about any specific media organization. My understanding from sources within one of those media organizations [ABC, WaPo, and NYT] that you cited, and a major American media organization, was that they were approached by the US government earlier on, before Shaye was actually locked up and put in prison and sentenced by this court, that a major US media organization that had done work with him was approached and told that they should stop working with him, suggesting that his relationship to Al Qaeda was more than just journalist

source relationship and that organization stopped working with Abdulelah Haider. To my knowledge, none of those organizations have take an editorial stance calling for his release or even or even condemning the sham nature of his trial.

That is, presumably around the time ABC and WaPo and NYT were all relying on Shaye to get reporting from Yemen, the government approached at least one of them and told them to stop, which they did.

I find that particularly interesting given some reporting I reviewed yesterday while working on posts assessing whether the new NCTC data-sharing guidelines would have prevented the Nidal Hasan and Undiebomber attacks.

On November 16, 2009, 11 days after Nidal Hasan's attack and about a week after Pete Hoekstra revealed the email exchanges, the WaPo published a story based on a Shaye interview with Anwar al-Awlaki which provides far more information about the emails Awlaki exchanged with Hasan before the attack.

Shaea allowed a Post reporter to view a video recording of a man who closely resembles pictures of Aulaqi sitting in front of his laptop computer reading the e-mails, and to hear an audiotape in which a man, who like Aulaqi speaks English with an American accent, discusses his e-mail correspondence with Hasan.

The quotes in this article are based on Shaea's handwritten notes. Shaea said he was allowed to review the e-mails between Hasan and Aulaqi, but they were not provided to The Post.

[snip]

Aulaqi told Shaea that Hasan first reached out to him in an e-mail dated

Dec. 17, 2008. He described Hasan introducing himself and writing: "Do you remember me? I used to pray with you at the Virginia mosque."

Initially, Aulaqi said he did not recall Hasan and did not reply to the e-mail. But after Hasan sent two or three more e-mails, the cleric said he "started to remember who he was," according to Shaea.

Aulaqi said Hasan viewed him as a confidant. "It was clear from his e-mails that Nidal trusted me. Nidal told me: 'I speak with you about issues that I never speak with anyone else,' " he told Shaea.

The cleric said Hasan informed him that he had become a devout Muslim around the time Aulaqi was preaching at Dar al-Hijrah, in 2001 and 2002. "Anwar said, 'Maybe Nidal was affected by one of my lectures,'" said Shaea.

Of the dozen or so e-mails, said Shaea, Aulaqi replied to Hasan two or three times. Aulaqi declined to comment on what he told Hasan. Asked whether Hasan mentioned Fort Hood as a target in his e-mails, Shaea declined to comment.

Five days later, the WaPo published another big scoop about the emails, this time relying on two sources (one of whom may have had immediate proximity to Carl Levin) who were briefed on—but appear not to have seen personally—the emails. In addition to explaining the bureaucratic details of how SD FBI got the emails but DOD did not get the later, more incriminating ones, the WaPo's sources also revealed what looks like Hasan's attempt to send money to AQAP.

Hasan's contacts with extremist imam Anwar al-Aulaqi began as religious queries but took on a more specific and concrete tone before he moved to Texas,

where he allegedly unleashed the Nov. 5 attack that killed 13 people and wounded nearly three dozen, said the sources who were briefed on the e-mails, speaking on the condition of anonymity because the case is sensitive and unfolding. One of those sources said the two discussed in “cryptic and coded exchanges” the transfer of money overseas in ways that would not attract law enforcement attention.

“He [Hasan] clearly became more radicalized toward the end, and was having discussions related to the transfer of money and finances . . .,” said the source, who spoke at length in part because he was concerned the public accounting of the events has been incomplete. “It became very clear toward the end of those e-mails he was interested in taking action.”

[snip]

Bits and pieces of Hasan’s communications with Aulaqi have become public since the Fort Hood massacre, but the sources provided the most detailed description yet of the messages. The e-mails will help investigators determine whether Hasan’s alleged actions were motivated by psychological deterioration or inspired by radical religious views he found online and through e-mail exchanges with Aulaqi. [my emphasis]

Two days earlier, ABC—which was also working with Shaye in this period—provided the exact language Hasan used to talk about money, while revealing he had donated tens of thousands of dollars to Muslim charities (note this story is sourced to a US official with access to the emails).

Major Hasan also wrote, “My strength is my financial capabilities.”

Federal investigators have found that Hasan donated \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year to overseas Islamic "charities." As an Army major, his yearly salary, including housing and food allowances, was approximately \$92,000.

And spoke about looking forward to meeting Awlaki in the afterlife.

United States Army Major Nidal Hasan told a radical cleric considered by authorities to be an al-Qaeda recruiter, "I can't wait to join you" in the afterlife, according to an American official with top secret access to 18 e-mails exchanged between Hasan and the cleric, Anwar al Awlaki, over a six month period between Dec. 2008 and June 2009.

A month later, Shaye did another interview with Awlaki. In it, Awlaki taunted the US for not responding to Hasan's emails.

[Al-Jazeera]

"What did he say?"

[al-Awlaki]

"He asked whether killing American soldiers and officers is lawful or not?"

[Al-Jazeera]

"He asked you this question more than a year before he executed the operation?"

[al-Awlaki]

"Yes, and I wonder where were the American security forces that one day claimed they can read the numbers of any license plate, anywhere in the world, from space."

Awlaki himself provided spin on their discussion

about donating money to charity (though he doesn't seem to deny the money would support AQAP).

[Al-Jazeera]

"What did Nidal want from you in most of his messages?"

[al-Awlaki]

"Of course, as I mentioned to you, his first message was about the ruling of a Muslim soldier serving the American Army, killing his colleagues. And, via a group of letters Nidal explained his point of view about killing Israeli civilians and he supported that, and through these letters he mentioned Sharia-based and realistic excuses for targeting the Jews with rockets. Also, there were some messages through which he asked about a method of transferring some money to us in contributions for charity works."

The interview ended with Awlaki suggesting that Shaye publish the emails.

[Al-Jazeera]

"You previously spoke with me about your correspondence with Nidal, and you gave me the original copies of it, and throughout looking them over I found that he trusts and respects you, and now you say that you don't have a direct or strong relation with him?"

[al-Awlaki]

"I spoke with you about it [correspondence] and I explained it, and I gave it to you to publish it because the American Administration has prohibited publishing it. Why do they not want it out? What is the reason? Do they want to cover their security failure? Or, do they not want to confess that Nidal Hasan was a man of principle

and that he did what he did as a service to Islam? Do they pose to show it as a sudden, individual act with no relation to the actions of the criminal American Army?" [my emphasis]

Awlaki would again call for the release of those emails three months later.

Now, in addition to the report on civilian casualties in the December 17, 2009 strike, there are other reports that surely led the US to want to shut him up. After Yemen claimed to be negotiating for Awlaki's capture, Awlaki denied it through Shaye. Shaye also provided confirmation on Said Ali al-Shihri's role in AQAP, which means he may also have been aware of Mazin Salih Musaid al-Awfi, now suspected to have been a double agent infiltrated into AQAP.

Nidal Hasan will go on trial in June. I have no idea whether the government will finally declassify the emails for use in the trial (it's not like the government needs the emails as evidence of Hasan's actions, and they would also show how the government's own surveillance proved useless in preventing this attack). But Shaye's apparent one-time possession of a set of the emails—along with the government's squeamishness about their release—makes me wonder whether that's one of the many reasons why the government wanted to shut down his access to Western journalists.