

KARMAN ARGUES AGAINST AMNESTY FOR SALEH AS AL-AWLAKI FAMILY CONTINUES PROTESTS



A portion of a photo of Abdulrahman al-Awlaki from his Facebook memorial page.

As I wrote yesterday, the family of Anwar al-Awlaki and his son, Abdulrahman, has spoken out against the US killing of these two American citizens, one just 16 years old, in separate drone strikes in southern Yemen. The birth certificate of Abdulrahman has now been released to confirm his age and to counter false media reports that he was over 20 years old. In addition, the family has provided the name and age of a 17 year old cousin, Ahmed Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, who was killed in the same strike with Abdulrahman last Friday while they were enjoying a nighttime barbecue.

So far, I've seen no claims issued by the US that Abdulrahman was a militant. Instead, the implicit assumption is that Abdulrahman was collateral damage in a strike that was targeted at Ibrahim al-Bana, who is described as the media chief for al-Qaeda in the Arabian

Peninsula. By contrast, Anwar al-Awlaki was placed on Obama's official "hit list" of persons targeted for killing. The US has made multiple accusations against him, but those allegations have not been substantiated. Here is the Indian publication Frontline on the veracity of the US accusations:

After the events of September 11, 2001, Awlaki was among the small group of radicalised American Muslims who threw in their lot with Al Qaeda. His sermons in English with an American accent urging Muslims to wage jihad against the West reputedly had a wide fan following on YouTube and other websites. After a U.S. Army officer of Palestinian origin, Major Nidal Mallik Hassan, went on a killing spree in a military base at Fort Hood in November 2009, Awlaki's name hit the headlines. It was reported that the U.S. Army veteran was in touch with Awlaki before he went on the rampage in which 13 people were killed. Awlaki had denied having encouraged Hassan in any way but later praised his act saying that it had prevented the U.S. soldiers who were killed from being deployed in Afghanistan or Iraq where they "would have killed Muslims".

Awlaki was also blamed for attempts to blow up American passenger planes, though the claims have not been substantiated. The Obama administration linked Awlaki with the failed Christmas 2009 attempt of Umar Farrouk Abdulmutallib, the "underwear bomber", to bring down a Detroit-bound plane. Awlaki was also accused of playing a key role in the October 2010 "mail bomb" plot. Packets containing bombs, originating from Yemen and bound for the U.S., were intercepted in Dubai and Europe. In May 2010, a Pakistani-American who tried to detonate a car bomb in Manhattan told the U.S.

authorities that he was inspired by Awlaki's sermons.

In one of his sermons recorded in early 2010, Awlaki urged American Muslims to stage attacks. "Jihad against America is binding upon myself just as it is binding on every other able Muslim."

But if reports in the Arab media are anything to go by, Awlaki was only a minor cog, used mainly for propaganda purposes, in Al Qaeda's major network. His fluency in both English and Arabic coupled with his knowledge of the Quran helped him gather a big fan following, especially among the youth. Experts on Yemen have said that he had no operational role in Al Qaeda. The top commanders are Yemenis and Saudis who have been leading the fight against the U.S. presence in the region for many years. The AQAP's main leadership continues to be intact and is no doubt busy hatching new terror plans. Awlaki was forced to flee into the desolate mountain region where his tribe is located and where Al Qaeda has a presence in order to escape from the Americans, who had put a bounty on his head.

The failure of the US to provide any substantiation for its allegations against Anwar al-Awlaki is telling. Marcy has written extensively on the propensity of Obama Administration figures in the intelligence community to leak classified information that puts the administration in a good light. There have been no such leaks with details confirming the allegations against al-Awlaki, so the information above from Frontline stands as a fairly strong impeachment of US claims.

In very closely related news regarding Yemen and the US, the Financial Times has a long article this morning detailing how Yemeni President Ali

Abdullah Saleh has stolen millions of dollars, perhaps even from US funding provided for counterterrorism activities, with his son has using up to \$5 million to purchase luxury real estate in the Washington, DC area:

A *New York Times* story last year said there was a sense in Yemen that the country was run as “a family corporation.” A 2005 State Department cable, written by an officer at the U.S. Embassy in Sanaa and released this year by WikiLeaks, made the case that “Rampant official corruption impedes foreign investment, economic growth, and comprehensive development.” The State Department’s most recent annual human rights report on Yemen says that “officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity” and that international observers “presumed that government officials and parliamentarians benefited from insider arrangements and embezzlement.”

“It’s a poor country, so there isn’t a lot of money to steal, but because it’s poor it needs every dollar it can get,” David Newton, who served as U.S. ambassador to Yemen between 1994 and 1997, told me. “Corruption really hurts.”

President Barack Obama’s administration – which has been targeting suspected al Qaeda militants operating in Yemen with drone strikes, including U.S.-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who was killed in late September – has worked closely with Saleh’s government on counterterrorism matters but has spoken out against the regime. During his address to the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 21, Obama said Yemenis calling for Saleh’s ouster were seeking to “prevail over a corrupt system” and that “America

supports those aspirations.”

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Stephanie Brancaforte, the Berlin-based campaign director for **Avaaz**, a global human rights group that has worked extensively on Yemen and that alerted me to the D.C. properties, criticized U.S. policy. “Saleh’s forces have not only killed protesters – they have inflicted a humanitarian crackdown by intentionally cutting off water and electricity to millions of people,” she said. “The U.S. invested more than \$100 million to fight terrorism in Yemen, but that money has primarily gone to prop up a corrupt family.... Meanwhile, the average Yemeni is less likely to be a victim of terrorism than malnutrition.”

Fortunately, there is a powerful voice speaking out against Saleh and especially against the current efforts to grant Saleh and his family immunity in return for him leaving office.

Yemini activist Tawakul Karman is one of three winners of this year’s Nobel Peace Prize. From Reuters:

Yemeni Nobel peace laureate Tawakul Karman made an impassioned plea to the United Nations on Tuesday to repudiate a Gulf Arab plan that would grant immunity to her country’s “war criminal” president.

Karman, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with two Liberian women this month, arrived in New York as the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council circulated a draft resolution to the full 15-nation body. That proposal urges the swift “signature and implementation” of the Gulf Arab plan, under which Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh would be immune from prosecution.

"The youth's peaceful revolution is against the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) initiative, especially because it gives immunity to Saleh and his family," Karman told reporters at a demonstration near the United Nations, where she was greeted by a cheering crowd of around 150 Yemeni supporters.

"We don't think that the Security Council will be trapped in a resolution that will give immunity to the regime," said Karman, who dedicated her Nobel prize to the Arab uprisings and to those killed in the upheavals.

Just as the Obama Administration was too slow to withdraw its support for the Mubarak regime during the Egyptian uprising, once again former Nobel Peace Prize laureate Obama finds himself continuing to provide lavish support for a corrupt war criminal, this time in Yemen, while the subjects of the war criminal languish in enforced poverty and suffer abuse.