

Understanding al Qaeda Through the Massive Trove of Osama bin Laden's Files
A conversation with Rukmini Callimachi, Thomas Joscelyn, and Bill Roggio,
moderated by Kimberly Dozier, with opening remarks by Cliff May

MAY: Good afternoon and welcome to FDD, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I'm Cliff May, I'm the founder and president and I'm pleased to welcome you today to our conversation, *Understanding al Qaeda Through the Massive Trove of Osama bin Laden's Files*. I think you all know the background. In May of 2011, a Navy SEAL team went to Abbottabad, Pakistan. They killed Osama bin Laden. They had a second mission to take as much information as they could from his compound, they did so. We should have learned a huge amount of information from that treasure trove, but we didn't because it was under lock and key. FDD's Tom Joscelyn and Bill Roggio were among the most vociferous advocates and lobbyists and pressurers to release that information. Most recently, 470,000 documents have been released and Tom and Bill were given an advanced look by Mike Pompeo who took, in a way, the extraordinary step of saying, "No, this information should be available to scholars and journalists and others."

With that, I'm pleased to hand the conversation over today to our moderator, Kimberly Dozier who is Executive Editor of *The Cipher Brief* and who has had a distinguished career reporting on intelligence and national security issues. She covered the war in Iraq from 2003 until she was wounded in a car bombing in 2006. The last thing by way of housekeeping, I should note that today's event will be live streamed. I encourage guests here and online to join in today's conversation on Twitter @FDD and I also ask you to please silence your phones. Kim, thank you very much, I hand it over to you.

DOZIER: Cliff, thank you very much. Today we have with us three of the practitioners of the dark art of delving into everything al Qaeda. Also, ISIS, but we're going to dwell on al Qaeda today. In case you haven't met them before, we have Bill Roggio, founder of the *Long War Journal*, which is part of the FDD family now. Rukmini Callimachi who is the *New York Times* specialist on al Qaeda, foreign correspondent, and a former *AP* veteran. We worked together there. Tom Joscelyn who I asked him to bring out this notebook. Believe me, we're going to start broad but we're going to get pretty granular about this stuff pretty fast. These guys know their stuff inside and out. We're going to chat for about 45 minutes amongst ourselves and then open it up to questions from you all. With that, I'll start with the broad question, why did it take so long, Tom, to release these documents?

JOSCELYN: Anybody who deals with the intelligence bureaucracy knows that they're definitely allergic to releasing anything. We call generally for transparency on a lot of different matters. We think that that's basically the media's job is to push for transparency in all these different issues and the complexity of the 9/11 wars, transparency we think helps inform the public. Here we are sitting in 2017 and the US may not have large scale deployments in countries as we did in the past but we're still deployed in several areas and we're fighting mostly through the air in more countries now than ever. Understanding this whole threat spectrum and the enemy and how this all evolved, we think is crucial for understanding and debating the efficacy of these

policies and understanding your enemy. What better way to see it than through the eyes of Osama bin Laden and how he saw the world as a primary source on our enemies ?

Bill and I started fighting for releasing these files in May 2012. At the time, the Obama White House put out 17 files from this massive trove. We're sitting there, Bill and I are proudly nerds and we're sitting there thinking, "Okay, we're going to get all these goodies today." All that comes out are 17 files. There was a narrative associated with those files that said that basically al Qaeda was on the decline, everything was going poorly. There was no, sort of, cohesion to this international network. You have al Qaeda groups everywhere from West Africa to the heart of Middle East fighting, but they're not really al Qaeda, bin Laden had little control over all this.

That narrative that came out in 2012 we knew immediately was wrong, totally wrong, and was basically a cherry-picked version of what was going on. We said we can prove it's wrong based on the file. Even the 17 files that came out, we can prove it's wrong, but based on a lot of other information, we can show it's wrong. The only way we're really going to put this issue to rest, however, is to ultimately to get as much or everything released as possible. That's where this fight began. It began with a very simple question. What role did Osama bin Laden play in al Qaeda on the day he was killed? What was he doing?

DOZIER: Bill, can you describe the two tranches specifically? What were in the first 17 and then what was recently released to you guys first?

ROGGIO: The first 17 files, it was a mix. There was a little of information. We had some information on the communications with the Pakistani Taliban. We had information—one of the first files, am I right Tom? The Somali file that was in the first batch, right?

JOSCELYN: There was a letter written to the head of Shabaab that was an attachment to another letter that wasn't released but go ahead. Kim warned you, we're going to get nerdy.

ROGGIO: That's fine. I actually reported in 2010 that Zawahiri ordered Shabaab to obscure its ties with al Qaeda and they did it. The reasoning that I reported, I had it from very good sources, was that they were concerned about having the aid cut off because there was a lot of famine in Somalia at this time and also they wanted to keep the international coalition for coalescing and coming in and attacking Shabaab so Shabaab could run an insurgency. Shabaab is an al Qaeda branch. I was kind of mocked by reporting this but in one of those files was confirmation of that report.

DOZIER: Wait, so that was in the first set?

ROGGIO: That was in one of the first sets and we've seen more information on that actually in the next attachment to that or the initial response. It was a smattering of information in various different areas but it was—what you have to understand about these files is, is we may see one or two communications that would be in a long string of communications. When you said it was cherry picked, that has that feeling of all right they put this piece for this, they put out this piece for that. There was some information on Iran al Qaeda ties for instance. It's funny, when you looked at that, the argument was made, this shows that there were no ties. We read just

that one document and we say, actually, we see some indications that there are. It was a mix of information in that first batch but 17 files was not enough to draw any type of concrete conclusions, which were made at that time.

DOZIER: Between then and now, for the audience, can you describe again what was just released in terms of size and scope.

ROGGIO: I believe it's ...

JOSCELYN: 107,499 files of interest and then there are about another 300,000 plus software files.

DOZIER: It's like 450,000 pages.

JOSCELYN: 470,000 total files and documents.

ROGGIO: Audio, either reports in audio, so for instance we see reports on al Qaeda in Iraq at that time, which eventually became the Islamic State, communications back and forth. We see bin Laden's personal journal, video of Hamza bin Laden, there's family videos in there. Of course, a lot has been made about the Tom and Jerry videos and all of that stuff. We have to remember that they didn't just seize bin Laden's laptop and his bookcase but they seized everything that was used. I imagine if someone looked at your family computer, they would see a whole lot of different information. We've seen communications about the Pakistani Taliban. We've really only scratched the surface.

DOZIER: It's his digital life.

ROGGIO: Yes, not just his, but his family's as well.

DOZIER: Rukmini, the difference between the first release and the second release, why do you think the Obama administration was holding those documents back?

CALLIMACHI: I can only speak to my own reporting and what my interaction with the administration was. In 2011, when Osama bin Laden was killed, I was the West Africa bureau chief for the AP. I was based in Senegal, but I covered the region. About six months later, a branch of al Qaeda called al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or AQIM took over the northern half of Mali. It was a territory the size of Afghanistan, so this enormous, enormous territory. When I was calling officials in Washington and diplomats at the embassy and analysts, many of them except for Tom and Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and a few others, the narrative I would get is that this group in Mali was actually not really connected to al Qaeda. It had opportunistically taken the al Qaeda name in order to have prestige and scare people and that in fact, those people were just criminals. They were drug dealers, they were cigarette smugglers, and they were kidnapping people for ransom in a criminal way.

DOZIER: These are not the al Qaeda droids you're looking for.

CALLIMACHI: This is not al Qaeda. In 2013, the French went in and flushed out this group. I was among the reports that was able to get to the city of Timbuktu. Timbuktu actually exists, it's a real place. I went building by building in the buildings that had been occupied by this terror group and started just collecting the thousands of documents that they had left behind. I worked with a translator for the next year and suddenly my world view, which had been informed by officials—I think most reporters work this way because it's very hard to get access to the terror group—that world view started to fall apart because among the documents that I was finding in Mali was, for example, a disciplinary letter from al Qaeda reprimanding a Malian commander who had negotiated the ransom of a Canadian hostage on his own without consulting al Qaeda central. That was going back to 2008/2009. Suddenly I was seeing that this group that I was told really had no ties—

DOZIER: Was a bunch of criminals with no connection to al Qaeda main.

CALLIMACHI: With no connection, exactly, was in fact being micromanaged by al Qaeda central. When the first set of Abbottabad documents came out, if you read them carefully with this knowledge in mind, you can find evidence of this micromanaging. For instance, in the letters from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula where you see them giving each other instructions, guidance, etc. But the overall narrative that I think was being pushed to the press, and if you look back at the editorials that were done when that trove came out, was an image of bin Laden isolated. He had lost control of this group. I remember one of the headlines describing him was a "lion in winter." In fact, the new trove that has now come out confirms very much what I was seeing in Mali, which is not just real connective tissue, but connective tissue to the point of them being micromanaged from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Very minor personal decisions are being decided by the group thousands of miles away.

DOZIER: Do you think that that was something that was kept from the public's view because it revealed that there had to be reams of communication going back and forth, which means US intelligence, western intelligence was missing this?

CALLIMACHI: Think back to when bin Laden was killed. It was 2011, it was right before a major campaign season. I don't want to underplay the role that the killing of Osama bin Laden had. That was obviously a very, very important thing that happened. But I think that was theorized into something much bigger. The head of the organization has been killed and now—these are literally quotes that I would get, "The organization has been decimated." "The organization is in disarray." "The organization is on the run." At the same time that we were preparing to pull out troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, I think that it was important to portray this as a problem that no longer existed.

DOZIER: Tom, you all badgered two administrations. You got CIA director, Mike Pompeo to release the information. Why did it come from the CIA and not DNI like the last set of documents? What does that mean in terms of, there have been accusations out there that Pompeo released this with a political aim in mind, to hammer home a link, a supposed link between al Qaeda and Iran.

JOSCELYN: This is why you asked me to bring the binder.

DOZIER: Yeah, because I asked that question back there and he started blinding me with science and documents, so now he's going to do it to you.

JOSCELYN: We're going to get nerdy. The bottom line is this was—our role in this started with exactly the reasons Rukmini just outlined. It came down to a very simple question. What is al Qaeda? How is structured? What does the organization look like? I've got to tell you; the counter terrorism field is awful. It has all sorts of epistemological problems in answering these questions. The big reason why we wanted these files out was to answer these types of questions definitely based on primary source evidence so we don't have somebody chattering at each other their own opinion about it.

Mike Pompeo, Congressman Pompeo, I didn't even know who he was we when we started advocating for the release of this stuff. I think he was a new member of Congress. But he certainly heard us at HPSCI and elsewhere saying this stuff has to be released, it has to be release, it has to released. By the way, Congressman Devin Nunez fought to have this stuff released as well. He was a key architect of having this stuff put in the National Intelligence Authorization Act of 2014 that led to the release of more files from ODNI until this more subsequent release.

DOZIER: I just have to say, HPSCI is the House Intelligence Committee for those on C-SPAN who don't live and breathe this everyday like we do.

JOSCELYN: Yes, you got it, sorry. Good clarification. But anyway, I laughed when I saw this allegation that this was all about ginning up a tie between Iran and al Qaeda. The reason I laughed about is, it's actually not controversial at all that there's this tie. It's so uncontroversial that in fact, the Obama administration, their Treasury and State Departments over the course of five years issued numerous terrorist designations citing the agreement between the Iranian regime and al Qaeda that allows al Qaeda to maintain—these are their words now, not mine—a core facilitation pipeline inside Iran. What I was showing Kim was, I said, "I don't need the bin Laden files if that's the argument I wanted to make and it's not the only thing we're interested. It's probably one of 50 things we interested in the files." If that was what I wanted to make, all I'd have to do is point to what the Obama administration said.

DOZIER: This is Treasury document.

JOSCELYN: This is a Treasury Department terrorist designation. This goes through a very rigorous interagency intelligence process. It has to hold up in a court of law. This is citing firm intelligence to make this designation and there were a whole series that started on July 28, 2011.

DOZIER: This is an unclassified document that any of y'all can look up.

JOSCELYN: They start by saying that the Treasury Department was targeting al Qaeda's key funding and support network using Iran as a critical transit point. They talked about

uncovering the formerly secret deal between Iran and al Qaeda. Their words, not mine. Then in December 2011, I want to give you an example of how—

DOZIER: This is all after the May 2011 raid.

JOSCELYN: Right. This stuff is flowing out in part. Parts of the US government are using the bin Laden files to justify terrorist designations and rewards for offers and that sort of thing, while other parts are basically putting their head in the sand and don't want to hear it. In December 2011, here's the State Department now. This is the State Department in 2011, they offer a \$10 million reward for Yasin al-Suri. Yasin al-Suri is a major al Qaeda facilitator and they say al-Suri is operating under an agreement between al Qaeda and the Iranian government and it gives you all sorts of details on it. We could go on like this for the next eight hours if you want, I can walk you through all the details of the files.

The bottom line was, when it comes to this thorny issue of Iran-al Qaeda, the truth is they do have an agreement, I can cite evidence all day if you want. They also have hostilities against each other, they fight each other in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere. This is not a love affair. You have to tell the whole story. We alone were saying tell the whole story. Tell all the bits and pieces of it. That whole story includes a file written by Osama bin Laden himself.

DOZIER: This is from the documents that have just been released.

JOSCELYN: This is actually, it was released prior to that because HPSCI, the House Intelligence Committee basically told ODNI you have to release more files from bin Laden's compound. This file came out because of that. This file is written by Osama bin Laden on October 18, 2007. The head of the Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir had just threatened Iran publicly. What happens is, bin Laden says to him, he dresses him down, he says, "You shouldn't have done that. You have to consult with us if you're going to threaten the Iranians." Why? He explains that, "Iran is our main artery for funds, personnel, and communication." Then he also mentions—this is on the other side of the relationship now—the hostages. While Iran was allowing some al Qaeda guys to operate, this main artery of funds, they were keeping others as hostages. It's a duplicitous sort of relationship.

Our point in all of this is you want to understand this stuff granularly. If you want to understand the whole picture, you need to see the primary source evidence. You need to see all of it, not just parts of what people want to show you. You mentioned this whole accusation that Mike Pompeo is trying to gin up a connection between Iran and al Qaeda. There's a very simple answer to that. All anybody has to do is point to what the Obama administration said was in the bin Laden files, the functioning parts of it in the Treasury and State Department that repeatedly say this agreement between the two.

DOZIER: Rukmini, you did some reporting on the hostages being held.

CALLIMACHI: Yes, the *New York Times* was the first to break the story that Saif al Adel who is a very senior al Qaeda figure and was imprisoned in Iran had been released as part of a prisoner swap and that he had been released from Iran and was on the move. I was never

able to confirm where he went. We got a lot of pushback from the White House saying the story wasn't true. I had sourced it to an al Qaeda commander that I was speaking to and my colleague, Eric Schmidt in the Washington bureau had sourced it to officials he was speaking to. This Iran thing has always been just a really touchy subject. I agree with Tom that the most important thing is the primary source material. Let us see the evidence and let us try to report based on the evidence, rather than based on opinion.

JOSCELYN: If I can; one quick point, the reason why it's important to report on that evidence is not to justify a set of policies or anything along those lines. Sunshine causes problems for these guys. When the State Department in 2011 came out with a \$10 million reward for the chief al Qaeda facilitator in Iran, the Iranians were embarrassed, al Qaeda was embarrassed. They had to sideline him temporarily because of this embarrassment. Sunshine like that is the ultimate sort of disinfectant, it's the ultimate sort of problem for these guys, and because having a relationship with Iran is controversial for Sunni, Salafi, Jihadi, this is something that al Qaeda finds itself having to explain both internally, as we see in newly released files and externally. That's the whole point. Show the whole relationship. You have two sides of it, yes they're at odds in many ways, but they also have this agreement. Show the whole story.

DOZIER: Bill, you've done a lot of study over the years on how al Qaeda operates, communicates. What did you learn from the latest tranche that surprised you?

ROGGIO: There is one document that we're working on right now. It's a personnel file of 19 al Qaeda, I would call them mid-level leaders at this time. While no date was given on the letter, we're able to date it to a certain time period because one of these leaders was detained and escaped from Bagram Prison in late 2005 and then later he was recaptured in late 2006, so we know it was written probably in some timeframe in 2006. These 19 leaders, I believe we were able to identify somewhere around eight or nine of them. Again, I would call them, say like if you were looking in the military they'd be like majors, lieutenant colonels, colonels. These are the up-and-coming in al Qaeda. We killed several of them in drone strikes. It was al Qaeda's leader in Pakistan, al Qaeda's leader for Afghanistan, operational leader. Yasin al-Suri who Tom had mentioned, that personnel file—

JOSCELYN: Number one on the list.

ROGGIO: Yeah, he's the first guy profiled and they do discuss how he traveled, how he facilitated networks into Iran.

It's fascinating, al Qaeda as an organization is evaluating its future leadership. What fascinates me is not about the ones that we identify, it's the ones that we can't. Who are they? Where are they today? Are they dead? Are they alive? Several of them say, this guy has a future, this guy we can rely on him. It's a brief but detailed evaluation. Not only do you see what al Qaeda, who they think are their up and coming leaders but what is important to them. Are they married? Are they single? Al Qaeda likes their leaders to be married, they think it makes them stable. Their physical fitness, that's something they're interested in.

JOSCELYN: They don't like heavy guys.

DOZIER: They don't like heavy guys?

JOSCELYN: They don't like heavy guys.

ROGGIO: They don't. What their expertise is, what they're interested in doing. How are they perceived by their—all of these commanders, and this is clear to me based on looking at this particular document, and we've seen these type of files. We've seen how al Qaeda defines its general manager. We've seen other files in past releases, this is just one of the ones in the new release. In this case, this was al Qaeda's leadership in Afghanistan, as well as in Pakistan, particularly in Paktika Coast Province in Afghanistan and in North Waziristan inside Pakistan. It's clear that these were al Qaeda leaders who were embedded and fighting alongside the Haqqani network, which is not its own individual group. It is an integral part of the Taliban. Siraj Haqqani is a deputy emir for the Taliban. This is something Tom and I fight often, this attempt to disassociate the Haqqani network from the Taliban. You see these leaders how they're fighting. This is the type of thing that fascinates me.

It's very clear that when we seize a document like this that we start targeting these individuals because they started coming up off the radar. Did the US government know about them prior to seizing these documents from the bin Laden files or not? Those are interesting questions, which we may never know. But how al Qaeda perceives its leadership, where they're operating, all of these things, I think it's important for us. The best way to be able to ultimately defeat your enemy is you have to understand how they perceive themselves, how they operate, and what's important to them. That's what we see, we see elements of that within these files.

DOZIER: You're describing a very sophisticated network and one of the things we've heard in the post AQ or bin Laden era is that much of their network has been decimated.

ROGGIO: Yes.

DOZIER: We are hearing that now about ISIS. From what you've read in the files and the sophistication you're describing, how do you think they're operating now?

ROGGIO: Al Qaeda?

DOZIER: Ayman al-Zawahiri. Has it changed? Is he using some of the same things in terms to communicate?

ROGGIO: We know they're still fighting in Afghanistan. Remember, an Obama administration narrative from CIA from Defense Department officials, al Qaeda is decimated. But one of these things they told us for years is al Qaeda has 50-100 fighters. This number remained constant for six years straight.

JOSCELYN: No matter how many they killed.

DOZIER: I heard that a lot, yeah.

ROGGIO: Here, without even having the bin Laden documents, I reading ISAF at the time, International Security Assistance Force, which has now become Resolute Support. They were launching attacks and issuing press releases on al Qaeda members that were being killed in Afghanistan. One particular raid killed 50 guys. So the question is, is there now 0-50 al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan. We see this all the time, we compile this information, we map where these raids took place. So this is what's going on outside of the bin Laden files. Lo and behold in October 2015—Oh, and the other thing that the Defense Department intelligence said was al Qaeda is confined to Kunar and Nuristan Provinces in northeast Afghanistan, minimal presence outside of there. This is all the way up to 2015 when we conducted a raid in Shorabak District in Kandahar Province in southeastern Afghanistan. They killed around 200 al Qaeda fighters in this round alone.

DOZIER: That's negative 50.

ROGGIO: Yeah, exactly. You do the math. Again, outside of Kunar and Nuristan, more than 50-100 al Qaeda fighters. So, al Qaeda formed a branch, al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent. I think they responded to some of the losses that they incurred during the drone campaign. It's clear, bin Laden files do state in the files that they were taking losses and it was hurting them. They were talking about moving operatives. This back in, again, we're talking pre-2011 here. They're moving operatives in Afghanistan, they've identified provinces where they would be safe. Four provinces by the way that were not Kunar, actually one of them was Kunar.

DOZIER: They're sticking to places with security that is challenged.

ROGGIO: Yes.

DOZIER: Remote locations, places where they could blend in.

ROGGIO: Remote, mountainous, safe, with friendly forces operating there, difficult for American forces to operate. There's been press reports, al Qaeda has a large network inside Karachi. I never believed bin Laden was hiding in a cave in north or south Waziristan and I don't believe Zawahiri is, as well.

DOZIER: Does anyone want to take a bet here as to where he is now?

ROGGIO: I always say it's probably some city like Fayzabad or something like that. Pick your midsize city in central Pakistan.

DOZIER: I did spot some friends from the Pakistani embassy here today that may have some Q&A later about that.

ROGGIO: Pick a city like that and that's probably where you're going to nail him. Abbottabad, who ever heard of Abbottabad in Pakistan prior to the bin Laden raid.

DOZIER: Rukmini, in studying what you've been able to study so far because the trove is vast, what has been your takeaway?

CALLIMACHI: Super interesting communication between al Qaeda central and this group that had been portrayed as a bunch of criminals in Mali and western northern Africa.

DOZIER: AQIM.

CALLIMACHI: AQIM. For example, there's a letter in the trove that Tom just got to me yesterday and it's regarding these two Austrian tourists who were kidnapped in Tunisia circa 2008. I've actually gone to Austria to interview this couple. It was a horrific kidnapping. They were there with their two German shepherds and at the moment when they were kidnapped the al Qaeda affiliate that took them did not want to waste its bullets killing the animals and so they beat them to death in front of the couple. The woman could barely talk. She spent the whole interview crying. At the time, I had spoken to the negotiator that had gone into the desert to negotiate their release.

DOZIER: How long were they held?

CALLIMACHI: It wasn't that long, it was less than a year. I was seeing her in 2014 and she couldn't conduct the interview without crying. She was clearly a wounded person that I think had been changed by this. He was more sanguine. But anyway, the negotiator, a Malian man told me at the time that the Austrian government had paid two million euros. I reported that, and I got enormous pushback from the Austrian government that were very upset that we were reporting this. There's a letter in this trove that is found in Pakistan, in Osama bin Laden's house that confirms that it was a two-million-euro ransom and al Qaeda says, we need to keep this in the QT. We need to keep this secret because Austria has been pressured by the United States not to pay a ransom.

DOZIER: Wow. Did you ever think you'd get your reporting confirmed with the bin Laden trove?

CALLIMACHI: Last night I was on the train coming here and I was like, emailing the hostages going, hi, I don't know if you remember me from 2014. We had this rather emotional conversation and by the way, here's proof that what you and other people were telling me is true. Again, the thing that I find remarkable is these are physical letters. The presumption is that these are being hand carried from the deserts of northern African across these oceans, across this territory, all the way over to Pakistan. Yet, for things that are—a two-million-euro ransom is actually not that much compared to what AQIM would later get, but I find it just remarkable that for things of that nature, there's this voluminous correspondence going back between the affiliate in the Sahara and the core group.

Another example is al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, this is the group in Africa, it had a different name and it pledges allegiance to al Qaeda in 2006/2007. There's a letter from Ayman Zawahiri where he is going over the charter for the al Qaeda group in Africa. Basically, giving

notes on their bylaws and saying article 16, I think you should phrase it a little bit more differently. Article whatever, you should do it this way.

DOZIER: Like the most intrusive editor in the world.

CALLIMACHI: Exactly. Like editors that you and I have both had, yes. One of the suggestions that Zawahiri makes is the article stating what their goal was going to be in Africa was initially formulated to say it was going to be jihad against the Algerian regime. Zawahiri very gently says, I think you'd be better positioned to say that this is a more global thing and basically suggests that it should be against the West, against America, but in this territory.

DOZIER: Shaping their mission.

CALLIMACHI: So you see Zawahiri shaping their mission, making it global. Another ongoing trope that you hear about the groups like Boko Haram, Shabaab, even ISIS is that these are local groups with local grievances and of course they are local groups with local grievances but the whole point is when you become of this terror brand, those local grievances become part of something more global. You are hitting Abuja but you're hitting a western target in Abuja like the Hilton or you're hitting Algeria but you're hitting the United Nations compound in Algeria.

ROGGIO: Kim, can I jump in, she made a statement. We've seen in previous documents where al Qaeda is getting some of the funding released locally like with the Pakistan hostage exchange. They're getting their cut, al Qaeda central in Pakistan. These documents talk about moving money. Another thing to follow up with the movement of the Taliban in Pakistan, we've seen documents where again, al Qaeda is basically redlining the TTP movement of Taliban in Pakistan's charter. They're saying do this, do that. There's another document in there where al Qaeda or Hakimullah Mehsud who was the head of the Taliban in Pakistan where he was being upbraided for trying to poach some of al Qaeda's "companies" that were operating inside of Pakistan. You see this, everyone says the TTP is a local Taliban group that just hates the Pakistani government and yeah sure, al Qaeda has some ties to it and whatever but you see actual al Qaeda issuing directives—

DOZIER: Because they make it sound like trade ties or something when you talk to counter terrorism briefers on it.

ROGGIO: It's like corporate telling its local affiliate there, you've got to do this, this is how you're going to do it, this is how you're going to play the game. We see that time and time again from as far flung as the African desert to as close as to where al Qaeda central was inside of Pakistan.

DOZIER: Tom, you were saying that you're still, like every day you're finding new stuff and the communication with commanders in Iran will surprise people.

JOSCELYN: The Iraq stuff.

DOZIER: Sorry, Iraq.

JOSCELYN: I think the files are going to rewrite the history of the Iraq war. We've already learned things from these files that nobody knew previously. For example, bin Laden was receiving, fairly regularly—although we haven't fully cataloged them, so I'll stipulate that—fairly regularly audio reports from his commanders in Iraq. They weren't giving one of these handwritten letters or typed letters like other subordinates did. Instead, they would sit down and record a summary of the weekly events or however long the timeline was to explain what was going on and what their thinking was. These are very in depth reports talking about the political situation, talking about the economy, talking about different insurgency groups that they're either cooperating with or have problems with, very granular stuff.

DOZIER: This is al Qaeda in Iraq under Musab al-Zarqawi?

JOSCELYN: And afterwards, yes. This is the direct forerunner of the current ISIS, Islamic State. One of the big debates that's been spawned in the counter terrorism community and elsewhere and also between ISIS and al Qaeda was whether or not ISIS was really part of al Qaeda past 2006 when they first declared the Islamic State of Iraq. I think the files are going to end that debate once and for all. I think it's pretty clear from some of the files we've seen far that in fact, al Qaeda was still guiding and providing leadership for the Islamic State of Iraq and bin Laden considered it to be part of his global empire.

But you asked a key question earlier, this was a key question about the ebb and flow of this fight. People are now saying that ISIS is decimated just like al Qaeda was decimated. One of these audio files to bin Laden is fascinating. His commander in Iraq is saying to him, the field of jihad here in Iraq is fertile. Even if the Islamic State of Iraq collapses, we're going to keep still going. We have plenty of resources and there's plenty of opportunities for us to keep waging jihad here indefinitely. This is years before the Syrian uprisings and the complexity of that war spilled over and led to jihadist groups sprouting up there as well. They were already eyeing Syria years before from Iraq. They were eyeing it, seeing it as something the Islamic State of Iraq, in particular, could expand into Syria. They were already talking about that years before the opportunity that we saw sort of manifest itself.

That's the point I think ultimately that we make at *Long War Journal* and Rukmini makes is that there's an ebb and a flow to this fight. It's not that these guys are 10-foot ogres or that they're invincible, far from it. But if you only seize part of the story and say that's it, the Islamic State of Iraq has collapsed, we saw what happened. They bounced back and became ISIS, the global phenomenon. That's why you have to constantly keep track of these different organizations in sort of the long war that we keep trying to document.

DOZIER: Before opening up to the audience, one question I had wanted to ask you all is, which copy of the documents do you have? Do you have the first one that the CIA put out and then it pulled back?

JOSCELYN: We've got the malware version.

DOZIER: You've got the malware version.

JOSCELYN: Yeah, they gave me malware.

DOZIER: The CIA posted these documents.

JOSCELYN: Instead of giving us a helpful guide and some English translations because I struggle with Arabic although I can do some and I have experts to help with more. Instead of being helpful I that regard, it was quite unhelpful. Basically, what we were given was a, as Zan will know and Bill will know and some other people in this room will now, basically a giant jumble of files. You'll see a picture of a cat and a picture of a rose and then hey, this is a letter from a very important senior al Qaeda facilitator who is moving guys in Afghanistan. Cat, rose, flower, that sort of thing. That's basically what's been given to us. Many of the files also had the malware in it. The CIA had to take this stuff down, scrub it, and relaunch it. We got the original un-scrubbed version with the malware in it. The history books will show that I told them, if you're worried about that, you don't have to give it to us yet, you can wait, but we got the malware version.

DOZIER: Awesome. Anything to add on that?

ROGGIO: No.

DOZIER: You firewalled one computer that you're using to access it.

ROGGIO: I hope, I hope.

JOSCELYN: We think.

DOZIER: On that note, I would like to open up to questions from the audience. Do we have anyone that can be equally-

ROGGIO: There's one back here.

DOZIER: There's a microphone close to that person in the blue tie, and if you could introduce yourself.

HARVEY: Derek Harvey. Great rundown, I really appreciate it. There's a lot that's still going to come out as you said. I'm wondering, do you have any idea if there's any gap between what was released in the 470,000, besides a select number of highly classified documents that they want to retain, they're saying proprietary—not proprietary, but copyrighted material and pornography they weren't releasing, but do you there's a gap still of other material that might not be released? That's question one. Question number two is, the raid recovered only what the raid team could bring back with them and there was a lot of material left there and we do have Pakistanis here in the audience I think. But there was a treasure trove that they recovered too that has not been made accessible. Could you comment on that?

JOSCELYN: Derek just hit on two key questions. I don't know of course, what wasn't given to us. It was represented to me that it was basically, or what was released publicly now, that basically it was only the most operationally sort of sensitive stuff and I have some indications of what that is but I'm not sure about how much that is, of course.

But the second part of the question is something I asked about, which is if you go back through the raid, the Americans did carry out—basically, the Navy SEALs kill bin Laden and they start just pushing as much stuff into duffel bags as they can. They fill up what they have and they end up picking up al Qaeda duffel bags, gym bags on the floor and stuffing them as well. They're just trying to carry as much of this stuff out but, as Derek said, they did not get everything.

There's an open question about whether or not the stuff that the Pakistani's recovered, I'm going to assume the Americans got it, the US intelligence got, I'm going to assume that. But there's an open question about whether or not any of that material was included in what was released because that may include a piece of the picture. You may have part of the files that maybe we don't have that maybe fill in correspondence or fill in blanks where we have them. We don't know. The answer to your question is we don't know.

DOZIER: To your knowledge, how much was there an exchange of information with the Pakistani government?

JOSCELYN: My sense is this is very sensitive between the American government and—

DOZIER: Because it wasn't going well—

JOSCELYN: Highly controversial raid. The Abbottabad commission report, which was released or leaked online has some details on this. My sense is that, my guess is, I'll put it as a guess, is that the US got from Pakistan what they recovered or at least got from Pakistan what Pakistan was willing to give them from what was recovered. I doubt that all of that was included in this release would be my answer.

DOZIER: Sir, in the front row. The microphone is heading your way, and if you could introduce yourself.

JACKSON: Sure, my name is David Jackson. I'm a former director of *Voice of America*. Sort of related to that last question, I was curious whether you got a sense, any of you, about what percentage of this recent trove of documents has been shared over the years with America's allies?

JOSCELYN: I'll take that one too if you want. This is a great question. A couple of things, one, we know the documents have been used in a number of criminal cases including in Europe and elsewhere so some of the documents have been shared clearly. There have been criminal cases in Germany, for example, where somebody is mentioned in the files and then that file is used to prosecute that individual. But, you know, part of the reason why we advocated transparency in this regard is, we were hearing a lot of stories back in 2012 that there were fights

even within the bureaucracy about who was given access within the US government to the entirety of the files and that there were different fights going on bureaucratically even in regards to that. Our answer to that was, we believe in competitive analysis and freedom of information. The only way you can do that is to ensure as wide access as possible.

DOZIER: I was hearing gripes from intelligence analysts within the US government saying we can't get our hands on these files. It's strange. Now, we're living in a world of fake news, information operations, weaponizing information. Rukmini, you spent a lot of time watching ISIS and al Qaeda on social media and Bill, I know you do too. Has there been anything from the files that would be embarrassing to al Qaeda that you've seen turn people off or be weaponized in a way that it might turn followers off?

CALLIMACHI: I think this trove is still too young for it to have made it that far because as it is, most of it is not translated. But for example, when the Abbottabad raid occurred and they found pornography in Osama bin Laden's computer, I think that was something that you would see them, of course, the al Qaeda community took that as something that had been planted—

JOSCELYN: Yeah, they didn't believe it.

CALLIMACHI: They would never believe that bin Laden, a human being, could possibly ingest pornography. That was surely something embarrassing for the group.

JOSCELYN: By the way, we also found Bollywood videos in the latest cache. Somebody in the Abbottabad compound was a big fan of Bollywood videos. I had never actually watched many Bollywood videos but I've come to appreciate them actually now from watching them through bin Laden's computer.

DOZIER: You're looking for intelligence messages.

JOSCELYN: It's intelligence value, clearly intelligence value, absolutely.

DOZIER: Okay, got it.

ROGGIO: I think you raise an interesting question, an important question. I don't think they're going to, no matter what we put forward from those documents, the jihadists are just going to generally dismiss it. I do think probably one of the things that is very difficult for them to dismiss is the Iran-al Qaeda ties because you have—they could dismiss it as false but I think everyone knows what's going on in there. Members of al Qaeda have transited through Iran to get to Iraq and Syria and Pakistan and Afghanistan. They all know what's going on and having these files just come out and prove it, I think that is something that's very difficult for them to deny. The rest is easily dismissed.

CALLIMACHI: I think ISIS has made fun of al Qaeda on this point, right?

JOSCELYN: ISIS in their official magazine, al Naba or newsletter, they actually had a defector from al Qaeda who accused al Qaeda of being soft on Iran and al Qaeda's response was

basically, they didn't deny that they had a deal with Iran. So, al Qaeda actually issued a response in which they didn't deny that they had dealings with Iran. But it became something of an embarrassment for them, exactly right. The ISIS defector was saying, you guys are soft on Iran and you have a deal and there are safe houses in Iran that the Iranian intelligence is monitoring. There are al Qaeda safe houses and you don't do anything about it, you don't strike them. Al Qaeda's response was, yeah but you too. How did you get over to Syria and Iraq? You went through Iran and you went through the same safe houses. That was their answer.

Bottom line is, that agreement or that relationship is actually not controversial within ISIS, literature recognizes it, al Qaeda literature recognizes it, the files recognize it, the Obama administration recognizes it, courts, 9/11 Commission, go on and on and on. It's something that has to be discussed because as they were saying, it causes problems for al Qaeda.

DOZIER: Yet, in the hands of a savvy information operations officer, if they'd had that information back in 2011, that might have been something they would have wanted to include in a file to be made public. Maybe it wouldn't sway the jihadists but how about that vast middle of people who are considering going in that direction?

JOSCELYN: If I can add one more point on that, if you want something that's controversial, I know Rukmini has seen this a lot about ISIS. There's a big argument between ISIS and al Qaeda about whether or not ISIS had a Bay'ah, or allegiance to al Qaeda's leader, that was broken when Baghdadi declares the caliphate and declares himself to be the head of ISIS.

CALLIMACHI: Right.

JOSCELYN: These files I think probably could have been weaponized during the rise of ISIS to undermine the idea that ISIS never really had a Bay'ah to al Qaeda that was broken. This became a big deal, al Qaeda was calling Baghdadi the oath-breaker and their argument was how can you trust him and how can you guys pledge allegiance to him when he's broken his own oath to us. I think that these files make clear that that relationship was ongoing and it's something that could have been weaponized in that regard.

DOZIER: Sir, with the mustache.

CHAUDHRY: Thank you very much, I am Dr. Nisar Chaudhry. I'm a *CNN* analyst on South Asia. I heard these three words, disseminated, disarray, and on the run. I just wanted to know, is the president's strategy of containing, eliminating, disseminating al Qaeda and such groups, militant extremists and terrorists, is their strategy at present working to bring this war to a closure? Is it expanding instead? If it is expanding, what should be the strategy to bring it to a closure?

CALLIMACHI: I'm a journalist so of course I can't make policy recommendations, but what I can say is let's look at ISIS for a moment. ISIS held territory in Iraq, Syria, and Libya for more than three years that at its height was the size of the United Kingdom. They ruled 12 million people. They had recruits from 100 different countries, tens of thousands of people. I think it is significant that that territory has now been taken away. According to the latest

coalition figures I got, 96% of that territory has been taken away. But I see analysts and officials making the same declarations that I heard in 2011 and 2012, where they are conflating things. They're thinking that because the territory has been erased, that the group is now decimated, in disarray, and on the run. Literally, we're hearing the same terms.

All you have to do, in my opinion, is be on their telegram channels this is one of the apps that they use online, to see how active they remain today. Hundreds and hundreds of channels are populated by literally thousands of their acolytes online and they continue their jihad virtually. Just in October we saw the attack using a car in my home city, in New York. The young man who did that initially tried to put the ISIS flag on the hood of his car. He decided that that would be a little too obvious. Instead, he used it to cause violence and kill people and then when he was in his hospital bed, he then asked a nurse to deliver him an ISIS flag. Clearly, this guy, whether or not he was actually speaking to ISIS is taking on their mantle and believes that he is working in their name. I would caution us from thinking, especially with ISIS, in light of what we've seen with al Qaeda, that the current successes, which are important successes, that this somehow spells the end of the group.

DOZIER: I do have to say, I have heard from administration officials like top defense officials, top intel officials both talk about the virtual caliphate and also refer to this as a generational war.

CALLIMACHI: Finally. Finally.

DOZIER: But there's a difference between the national security officials you hear from and some of the messages out of the White House.

CALLIMACHI: Exactly. I spend a lot of time in Paris and in France because that was where the most devastating ISIS attack took place and I find the rhetoric of French officials to be very interesting. It was very similar to American officials before the November 13th attack. Following the November 13th attack, the state's prosecutor who is the one who does the press conferences after every subsequent attack that has occurred, in my opinion started to really level with the population. He would say things like this, it was almost like an Israeli dialogue.

DOZIER: The November 13th attack is the Bataclan attack, most people know it as that.

CALLIMACHI: The Bataclan attack, exactly right. But he would say things where he would make clear that this group is not defeated, it's not going to be defeated anytime soon. We're doing everything to keep you safe. We have this many investigations going on, but you have to understand that this is a major problem. That's the kind of rhetoric we're hearing out of France and that's because they've faced it in such an acute way. We haven't, I think heard that except privately in America. But I think that the most informed analysts that I speak to do call it a generational war, that this is something that is going to be here for a while. And I think frankly, I think we don't completely know how to defeat them. Perhaps you disagree with me, but if we did, I think we would have done it by now.

DOZIER: You look contemplative.

ROGGIO: What I might add, even though they've lost 96% of the territory or whatever that number is, I'm seeing them launch attacks in areas that they've recently lost. You see them on their videos and their telegram channels and whatnot. These attacks look very much like attacks we were witnessing in 2011, '12, and '13 prior to the Islamic State's seizing Fallujah in early 2014 and then Mosul and much of northern and central Iraq in mid-2014. It's very easy to say, they lost territory, therefore they're defeated. But they're not defeated on the battlefield. They've transitioned from openly controlling territory, now they're fighting a guerrilla-style insurgency. They're still active, they still have combat power that still draws in recruits. It still shows their followers that they're not just a virtual caliphate but that they still have a significant presence on the battlefield even though they don't control territory.

DOZIER: Back to al Qaeda, what I'm curious about is reading these documents, you see that they think strategically, they do alliances of convenience or alliances that help them seize both influence and power. Could you see cooperation with ISIS in its current form?

JOSCELYN: I think we should be wary that maybe some factions within ISIS could go back to the al Qaeda fold. You could see that happen. But the ISIS literature and their propaganda has been virulently anti al Qaeda for years and there are a number of leaders within ISIS that have really adopted a basically, "you're too soft, al Qaeda" approach. There are disagreements in terms of tactics and methodology and that sort of thing between the two organizations. We're always on the lookout for collusion in any of these different countries or sort of a bargain between these different factions. I just don't think you're going to see a full scale reconciliation of ISIS at all into al Qaeda. ISIS has adopted its own sort of methodology and sort of messaging to its recruits that's distinctly different in some ways from what al Qaeda has been saying.

DOZIER: More like the cooperation of convenience on the battlefield in Syria or Libya where they've been like, okay, we're in this area so you stay in this area or some weapons trades.

JOSCELYN: ISIS killed one of the most senior al Qaeda guys in Syria. They sent a suicide bomber to kill him back in early 2014, Abu Khalid al-Suri, they killed him. They've had some pretty intense infighting between the two in different areas. One of the things to keep looking out for in all of this—and I mentioned this file earlier—they understand that there's an ebb and a flow to this fight. They understand that there's times when they're surging and times when they're retreating. The bottom line is to keep an eye on it at all times to make sure you understand where they are in that process. The bottom line too for us is, for us ultimately none of this political. If the current White House spikes the football on ISIS, we're going to say you're wrong just as the previous administration spiked the football on al Qaeda and we said, you're wrong. To us, it has to do with the details and the actual analysis of what's going on, not anything to do with political messaging, that's the key thing here.

DOZIER: Sir.

TIMMERMAN: My name is Ken Timmerman. First question, were there any documents in this release relating to the 9/11 attacks? Second, there was a great deal of information actually

out in the public realm before 2011, which you mentioned when we could have weaponized the Iran/al Qaeda connection. There was an Iranian defector who walked into a US embassy in Azerbaijan in July 2001 and warned about the upcoming attacks. I was involved in a lawsuit that won a \$10 billion judgment in New York against the Islamic State of Iran for their involvement in the 9/11 attacks. You had documents that came out in the 9/11 report on pages 240, 241. Why do you think it is that the US intelligence community has consistently pushed back up until just recently on the Iranian connection both to al Qaeda and the Iranian connection in the September 11, 2001 attacks, which was mentioned first in the 9/11 commission report?

DOZIER: We have to be careful not to conflate the US intelligence community pushing back versus certain administrations pushing back.

TIMMERMAN: Two administrations in a row.

JOSCELYN: I'll do my quick answers. My quick answers are we're hunting for anything 9/11 related. It seems like the cache is probably more dated, it's not as old as that. It seems like it's more recent, a lot of the stuff we've seen but we still haven't gotten through a great deal of it. When it comes to Iran-al Qaeda, part of the issue is you see this argument that to justify the Iraq war, the Bush administration was supposedly hyping Saddam's connections to al Qaeda and that was used to justify the Iraq war. That's sort of a reflexive thing we see in these arguments too because we say when we bring this up, that doesn't follow that we want a regime change war in Iran. We've watched Iraq now, for how many years, Bill? This has been a nightmare. The fact that we'd want another Iraq war, are you kidding me?

The point is, is that reporting on the facts and what they are is a whole other issue and there's sort of a resistance I think for policy reasons mainly to admit that Iran and al Qaeda collude at times. That's a policy. And politicization by the way, goes both ways. It can go in the direction of trying to support a war or it could go the other way where somebody decides that basically they want to nix any ideas they think that are out there about a war and trying to play down real existing relationships. Our point is, we're not trying to justify any war, we just want to understand what our enemies are doing.

DOZIER: What I was referring to was the fact that there was if you read Michael Morell's book, *A Great War of Our Time*, he comes out with a narrative that is in this current release. It's a different narrative than al Qaeda was on its heels and it was the lion in winter watching the good old days in reruns on his non-cable TV. Instead, this former deputy director of the CIA, former acting director said that no, we realize that they were in touch in a very micro-managing way with their entire network. What the intelligence community thought versus what the two administrations in a row decided to release seem to be different things.

TIMMERMAN: Mike Morell has always rejected the Iran-al Qaeda connection.

DOZIER: I was referring to the behavior of al Qaeda.

JOSCELYN: Morell's book is very good on the point of what was bin Laden doing at the time he was killed. Morell was very good at explaining that prior to the bin Laden raid, the CIA

assessed that bin Laden was basically giving up day-to-day control of al Qaeda. He says after the documents are scooped up and the files, lo and behold, they realize no, no, no he was actually running the whole thing. That's very good clarifying language, I think that it's not just us nerds here who are combing through the files or Rukmini who is not a nerd but is just a great journalist or yourself or anybody else who is looking through this stuff. You have a senior official who says that that's what the reality of these files was. That's the clean analysis of it.

Part of why we wanted these files out is to settle this once and for all. That narrative that took hold in 2012, we still see traces of it and it affects analyses to this day. You will find people making the arguments that Rukmini was talking about with AQIM, we still see it. You still see people, well that's not really al Qaeda, it's a local group or what Bill was talking about with the Pakistani Taliban or all these organizations. By the way, the Afghan Taliban, we've got some good stories coming there. That's a very interesting set of files.

DOZIER: Bill, previews?

ROGGIO: I think there's uncomfortable truths in these files that make certain policy decisions very difficult to execute such as negotiations with—the Obama administration wanted to negotiate with the Afghan Taliban. We're seeing evidence in there of what al Qaeda's view of that was, that they viewed the individuals that were negotiating with were actually nobodies within the Taliban. If there's evidence of al Qaeda and Taliban collusion in these documents, how can you release those documents if you want to push a policy of say, negotiating with the Taliban. It's not just Iran, it's what if we expose, we hope to see and we suspect we'll see perhaps exposing that golden chain, the donors. We haven't found the absolute proof of this yet, but if things like that are in these files, it makes executing policy in the Middle East, and South Asia—

JOSCELYN: Part of what Bill is holding back is we found files from an unknown Saudi sheikh who we're going to expose, we're going to figure out who he is and he's corresponding with bin Laden pretty regularly. He signs his letters, your loving brother who you know very well. It's all about stuff inside Saudi and this is the type of thing, which is very fascinating about these files. Who is that guy? Why does he have a direct line to bin Laden and why can he even at times chastise bin Laden for what he's doing, very interesting stuff.

DOZIER: Of course, that's also going to be more embarrassing potentially to the Obama administration because they would have had access to those files and is that guy still active? Did they ask the Saudi government to crack down on him, etc.? It'll raise all of those questions.

JOSCELYN: It's not just about the Obama administration, it's about the whole thing, the whole kit and caboodle. This is not about any one politician or political group or anything like that. This is about what is the ground truth of these files and what do they expose about all of this? Like I said at the outset, we're fighting in more places today than ever. We don't have large scale troop deployments, but we're fighting in all these different areas. Shouldn't we have more information about who it is exactly we're fighting, who supports them, and why does this thing keep going? Isn't that important to uncover and to discuss and to debate and then figure out what the best approach is for countering it? Because you guys asked the exact question, we don't how to win this thing yet.

DOZIER: In the front row?

HASHIMI: Thank you, Zafar Hashimi from Embassy of Afghanistan, political counselor. Quick question on the potential relationship or complacency or any negligence on the Pakistani government, especially its military to allow Osama bin Laden to be there and operate from under the nose of the Pakistani military in Abbottabad. Was there anything that the previous administration could have looked and had Pakistan be held accountable or that the Trump administration use such evidence to have this new bold policy that kind of puts Pakistan in its place?

JOSCELYN: Do you want me to take this one?

ROGGIO: Yeah, go ahead.

JOSCELYN: First, we need the government of Afghanistan to talk to me about Hamza bin Laden. I've got some questions outstanding about him and his current role in Afghanistan so we'll follow up after this because there's some very interesting things there, I think. The second thing is the Pakistan situation is very complex. You see in fact, that al Qaeda was leading the insurgency against parts of the Pakistani state and was directing this. Certain Pakistani officials by the way, in the files it shows that certain Pakistani knew that when they wanted to negotiate a truce with the Pakistani Taliban and other insurgents, they knew where to go. They went through intermediaries to bin Laden, which suggests they knew he was close at hand.

But the problem is from our perspective and what we see is that there are these other groups—as you well know, in Afghanistan—there are other groups including the Afghan Taliban, which have been de facto sponsored by the Pakistani ISI and the military for years. Here's the trick, some of those groups are also deeply in bed with al Qaeda and were part of bin Laden's support network in Pakistan. It provides these cutouts that were basically helping to buttress what al Qaeda was doing in Pakistan that also on the other hand were maintaining relations with the Pakistani state. Our whole point in all this is that all that needs to be untangled. We've spent more time trying to answer that question you just had than anything else since we got the files. Many sleepless nights, many pots of coffee. We're going through these files very carefully. It's a very difficult web to untangle to get to the whole truth of it but we have been suspicious all along as everybody else has. Who knew he was there and how do we prove that?

DOZIER: Gentleman in the back of the room in the green jacket.

RASHIDI: Thank you very much. Rahim Rashidi from *Kurdistan TV*. Simple question, CIA director, he confirmed that Qasem Soleimani was in Kirkuk and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, they were used through our militia in Iraq, that is very clear. There were used US weapon to attack Kurdistan, to attack Pershmerga to attack US ally and strategy is not clear.

ROGGIO: I agree with you. The US military has whitewashed the roles of Shia militia inside of Iraq. These are militia, one of them, they are under an umbrella called the popular mobilization forces. It's operations leader is an individual who is listed as a specially designated

global terrorist by the US government, al-Muhandis who you mentioned. In his designation, he's listed as an advisor to Qasem Soleimani. The popular mobilization forces today reports directly to the prime minister of Iraq and it's institutionalized as an official arm of the Iraqi military, but again, it only reports to the prime minister. The US military, the US State Department has whitewashed this issue. They're position has been that they're part of the official government.

One of these organizations, it's called Hezbollah Brigades, it's not Lebanese Hezbollah, it's listed as a foreign terrorist organization. All of the key groups in the popular mobilization forces, all of the largest militias, the most influential, the most powerful that have been at the forefront of the Iraqi offenses in every major city inside of Iraq, they're all hostile to the United States. Several of their leaders are listed as designated global terrorists. Some of them have openly stated "If Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, orders me to overthrow the Iraqi government, I will do that, I am at his calling." They've made threats against the United States. They said they would target the United States if ordered to do by Khamenei. As you said, Soleimani has even been identified as an advisor to the Iraqi prime minister. You have a significant problem here inside of Iraq.

The US withdraw in my estimation, they opened the door for Iranian influence to flood in. The ironic thing is when I was embedded in Iraq and spoke to senior and mid-level Iraqi military officers who by all accounts were loyal to the Iraqi government, they feared just this thing. They predicted that a US withdrawal would allow this to happen. There needs to be clarity from the US government in order to know how to deal with this problem. What has been established inside of Iraq with these popular mobilization forces is basically analogous to Iraq's IRGC. That is what's been created. They're going to usurp power over the military. They already really have done that. They've been the most influential force on the battlefield next to the counter-terrorism service, which also reports to Iraq's prime minister.

It's a very big problem and it's one I'm not very confident in seeing this problem being resolved in any time shortly unless there's a major change in the understanding. Look, the bin Laden files, you have to understand, I realize there's no connection here between the two but we have to understand what is actually going on and look at it reasonably and say this is what's happening in order to develop policy and strategy to counter it. When you have top US officials and US generals saying, PMF is not a problem inside of Iraq, well then that's what US policy makers are getting and therefore you have this problem. I'm going to say one more thing. Look at the problem that Hezbollah has created with what, a population of four million in Lebanon. Now you have Iraq a population of 30-something million people. That's what the PMF's recruiting base is. This is what's in store for the Middle East.

DOZIER: As moderator, I have to ask, is there anyone from the State Department or the Iraqi embassy in the crowd who wants to stand up and take that? Not this time, okay. We have a question in the back of the room.

DE LUCE: Dan De Luce from *Foreign Policy*. Thanks for this. I wanted to ask you, in light of these documents and what you've studied over the years, how would compare al Qaeda leadership's relationship to Pakistan and elements of Pakistan's government and its relationship with Iran and the IRGC. Is there any analogy there? Is it totally different?

JOSCELYN: That's a really tough question to answer because it's two totally different contexts. When it comes to Pakistan, their big complaint you'll see in the al Qaeda letters is that they cooperate with the US against al Qaeda, parts of the Pakistani state do. They complain about that whereas they don't have that complaint with Iran necessarily. The trick is that Pakistan is not exporting their own revolution throughout the region whereas Iran is and al Qaeda's big problem with Iran is they don't want the Iranian style Shi'ism to basically spread throughout the region when they want their version of Islam to spread throughout the region. There are ideological problems there, big time between what Iran wants to do and what al Qaeda wants to do. Within Pakistan but again, that doesn't preclude them from cooperating in some ways.

With Pakistan, the problem again comes back to the role of the American state. You can see, we've seen a lot of files where they're even debating what do you when you have a Pakistani spy? Somebody who is clearly working for some part of Pakistani intel or some part of the Pakistani establishment against us. Can we kill him outright? What do we have to do with him? You can see them having that sort of granular level struggle within Pakistan on this.

Years ago, I'll just say this one quick point. Steve Cole has a book coming out on directorate S, part of the intelligence service in the ISI, which I'm going to review. I think it's pretty good. I haven't read the whole thing yet. It strikes me as pretty important. It's hitting on the key issue here, which is in Pakistan you have wheels within wheels, whereas part of the intelligence service has assisted and helped the US against the jihads, part of it has not. The part of it that has not is still not fully understood and that's what we're trying to figure out is directorate S, parts of the Pakistani establishment, what is the level of their collusion with al Qaeda specifically? You can show that they're colluding directly with groups that collude with al Qaeda or align with al Qaeda. The question is what about the direct relationship? That's what we're still trying to basically figure out.

ROGGIO: One of the things we've seen in Pakistan is the Pakistani military has targeted al Qaeda leaders, for instance they killed Adnan Shukrijuma when it launched its offenses in south Waziristan. Whether it was intentional or accidental, I can't tell you, but we know they have and they permitted the US to launch drone strikes to kill al Qaeda leaders. There's certainly a tension there and al Qaeda has supported the movement of Taliban in Pakistan, which had its whole insurgency in the northwest frontier province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa now. That was a problem. That was contentious with the Pakistani state and the establishment in general. But at the same time, this is the good Taliban versus bad Taliban narrative here. What Pakistan tried to do is say, we have good Taliban and they're the Afghan Taliban. It's Lashkar-e-Taiba. It's Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. It's all the groups that fight in Kashmir. Then there's the bad Taliban and we'll call them al Qaeda and we'll call that the movement of Taliban in Pakistan and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, although I'm not even sure about that one anymore.

You have this dynamic going on but they either ignore intentionally or unintentionally—I'm sure it's intentional—is that the good Taliban supports the bad Taliban. When the Pakistani, and this is in the bin Laden files, when the Pakistani government wanted to negotiate a truce with al Qaeda, who did they reach out to, they reach to the good Taliban. They reach out to Faisal Rehman Khalil the head of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Suraj Lakhani, the deputy emir of the

Afghan Taliban and they try and facilitate and coordinate a truce with al Qaeda and with the movement in the Taliban in Pakistan. That's the dynamic that we see there and what they don't understand is that these groups, the good Taliban shelters the bad Taliban. They provide them arms and money and weapons and safe haven, everything they need to survive.

That's the dynamic that we see publicly and I think it's part of the dynamic we're seeing inside the documents as well, but we do expect to see that—again, I go back to how does Osama bin Laden live outside of Pakistan's West Point without their direct knowledge. Anyone that understands what Abbottabad is, it's not an open city here like the United States. There's checkpoints to go from A to B to C all throughout the city.

DOZIER: I have to ask, was there anything so far in the document file, the recent release that shows communications with Pakistani officials and al Qaeda?

ROGGIO: That's the information where they're trying to negotiate a truce.

DOZIER: But I mean not just a truce, other types of real cooperation?

ROGGIO: I haven't seen anything like that. Have you seen anything like that?

JOSCELYN: This is what is going to give me a heart attack. This is what we're working on desperately to figure out from these files. I'll say this, one quick point. There's a very interesting file I should have brought up that we just finished translating, which is al Qaeda's assessment of the US strategy for combating al Qaeda and affiliated groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Al Qaeda believed that Pakistan didn't want the jihadi problem to go away entirely because that meant the rest of the international community would have to focus on other issues including the nuclear program and other things within Pakistan. It was a very sophisticated reading of the whole situation that al Qaeda had in Pakistan. That file was very interesting for a lot of reasons.

DOZIER: We have time for one more question. I just want to see—I hadn't asked anyone on this side of the room.

ROGGIO: There's a gentleman in the back of the room there.

DOZIER: Okay, the gentleman in the back of the room who I cannot see because of the building structure.

MUELLER: John Mueller from Cato Institute. I'd like to ask about whether these communications had consequences. The usual take on Zarqawi for example was that there were a lot messages coming from al Qaeda central but he kept doing what he was doing. Do you see a different take when you look at these materials coming out in 2011?

DOZIER: Can I just do a one, two. Also, this gentleman, can you ask your question as well. We're getting you a microphone, just a second. The microphone traveled to that side of the room. It's a lightening round of two questions.

SHULSKY: Abe Shulsky from Hudson Institute. One of the more amazing things that comes out of this, it seems to me, is the amount of communication that al Qaeda central must have been managing. I was just wondering if you've got any sense from these documents how this was done? You would think there would be enough indications of how this was going on that that would have given us a lot of opportunities to intercept it. I was just wondering if you saw anything like that.

JOSCELYN: Real quick on the al Qaeda in Iraq point and Zarqawi. I think the internal files from al Qaeda still laud Zarqawi and yes, I think there were tensions and they're fraught with difficulties in terms of their relationship, but I think that part of that whole messaging of that they were trying to dress down Zarqawi constantly was looking at only one window in their relations with Zarqawi. At numerous other times, they were praising Zarqawi and basically saw him as their guy in Iraq. They had problems with some of his tactics for sure, but overall he was still their guy, especially after swearing allegiance and I think he was affiliated with al Qaeda before that.

In fact, this will kind of answer both of your points or start to, al Qaeda was issuing directives to the heirs of Zarqawi. After Zarqawi is killed in June 2006, we're seeing directives that still go out to the Islamic State of Iraq, his successors. Even as Rukmini was talking about the minutia, the granular detail, one of these letters is talking about the administrative body for the office of mujahedeen affairs and Ayman al-Zawahiri writes to the heads of the Islamic State of Iraq, these are Zarqawi's successors and says, Sheikh bin Laden says you need to set up an office within the office of the mujahedeen affairs and here's what you're going to do. You're going to take down all the personal biographical information on these guys, you're going to sort them, you're going to figure out who's who and what they can do and what their talents are, basically issuing administrative orders to the Islamic State of Iraq.

On the question of all of this stuff was transported, some of it was courier, we know that, thumb drives, that kind of thing, but what you're looking at in the bin Laden cache are files that come into al Qaeda at different times with different personalities. And so he inherited one of his key guys, Atiya Abd al Rahman who was his right hand at the time of his death, Rahman probably communicated in different ways with people over time. He probably got communications that came in at different times in different ways. It wasn't always necessarily courier in the end for everything we're looking at, although a portion of it was.

DOZIER: Rukmini, did you have anything to add?

CALLIMACHI: It's really funny that you mention this mujahedeen office, this administrative office. That letter from the man who is now the head of al Qaeda specifically says that they need to keep a register of all of their new recruits and that they need to identify their special skills. What talents do they have? It's basically like an HR department. Just to fast forward now to the Islamic State, I have found these documents that the Islamic State issues to their new recruits, like an intake form, an application. Who is your mom? Who is your dad? Where did you go to school? What do you want to do inside of the Islamic State? What particular skills do you have? Have you ever been arrested for terrorism charges? Obviously, that would be

a good thing. You see the successor to the Islamic State in Iraq very much applying this particular piece of administrative advice that came I think in 2008.

ROGGIO: One more point, that just shows this wasn't just a group with some terrorist cells here and there and if we just kill this key leader and this key leader then the whole thing falls apart. They were built to survive the drone campaign from 2007 to 2015 when it started winding down in Pakistan. A small cellular terrorist group doesn't set up an administrative office. These are the things that we learn and see this time and time again. Central is directing to its branches—which we prefer over affiliates—and they're passing down lessons learned and it's being passed back up to the top. This is what successful organizations do. Whether they did as well as some of the finest corporations out there, that certainly remains to be seen, but it's well enough to go from a jihad where al Qaeda just had a presence in Afghanistan fighting alongside the Taliban to a global terrorist insurgency to this day.

DOZIER: Closing thoughts from each of you. My lightening round question is what have you seen in the files that answers the question what keeps drawing followers to al Qaeda? Tom?

JOSCELYN: I haven't seen a lot of the recruiting stuff yet, but what you can see consistently in their messaging that they're telling others to disseminate is they do believe in a conspiratorial view of the world. They believe that there is this grand alliance between America and the Zionists to basically conspire against Muslims everywhere and that basically, everything that happens or befalls them in the world is a product of this conspiratorial anti-Islamic viewpoint.

But that's part of the reason why we've been very strong on this at *Long War Journal* when we talk about the rhetoric in this country when it comes to Muslims either here in this country or abroad to be very careful in distinguishing between the vast majority of Muslims who have nothing to do with this and are not part of these movements and are not part of these groups and the fact that ultimately they're on the front lines whether you're in Afghanistan or you're in Mali. Ultimately on the front lines is a local Muslim, more often than not, who has to fight these guys. They want to erase that distinction. They want to say that they represent all of Islam and all Muslims and of course, that's false, but that's a key theme that you see them saying in their messaging and it's very important upon us to make sure that we're very careful in our rhetoric to not give into that false narrative.

CALLIMACHI: Regarding the messaging, I think what I would take away from them is their timeline. Their timeline, at least if you take them at their word, seems to be eternity. They're fighting forever. I was in Iraq last year when the start of the Mosul operation happened in October. At that point in time, when I was speaking to both US and Iraqi officials, they were hopeful, optimistic that they could take Mosul before Obama left office, which would have been in January, so three months. Instead, it was a nine-month long slog that the most senior general on the American side who was helping the coalition described as the worst fighting he had seen in 35 years comparable to the worst battles of World War II. I think that one of the things we're up against is that their timeline is forever and our timeline is a political one where our leaders are of course, under enormous pressure to show results. Unfortunately, in that effort to show results, we repeatedly underestimate them and we repeatedly see them as smaller than they are.

DOZIER: We tell ourselves the story we want to hear as opposed to the reality in front of us.

CALLIMACHI: That's right.

ROGGIO: In addition to what Tom and Rukmini have said, I see two other things there. I see that commitment to the fight, which—they are planning for the long haul and that's very important to them and the religious justification for what they're doing, they do try to put themselves as the vanguard, not just the fighting vanguard, but they're the true believers. This is something that they're very clear, like they're very concerned about killing Muslims unnecessarily, for instance. This is part of the schism between the Islamic State and al Qaeda comes and you see the seeds of this. Zarqawi was definitely their guy. I even read one recent document where they said, when he swore allegiance to us when he was part monotheism as in jihad, which was his group before, which certainly became al Qaeda in Iraq. They're very clear that they want to project themselves as being righteous fighters, religious fighters. It's not just a war against the West but it's a religious war that they're putting forward. That's something, I think, that is appealing to the segment of the Muslim world that will support them.

DOZIER: On that note, I want to thank you all for the discussion, thank FDD for sponsoring this and if there are any folks in the intel world who are watching this and you have some more documents that you'd be willing to release, we're all for it.

JOSCELYN: Give them to Kim.

DOZIER: Thank you very much.