

**Sent:** Thu, 04 Jun 2015 13:45:41 -0400

**From:** "Lynch, Thomas" <thomas.lynch@ndu.edu>

**To:** "Collins, Joseph (CIV US NDU/CCO)" <collinsjo@ndu.edu>, "Pratt, Jonathan G DOS PAK" <prattjg@state.gov>, "Foster, Jon J5-PACC" <jonathan.d.foster10.civ@mail.mil>, "Abbas, Hassan (CIV US NDU/CISA)" <hassan.abbas@ndu.edu>, "Abbas, Rameez (CIV US NDU/CISA)" <rameez.abbas.civ@ndu.edu>, "Anindya Choudhury (COL IN Army NWC STU)" <anindya.choudhury.in@gc.ndu.edu>, "Bell, Michael (CIV US NDU/CISA)" <bellm@ndu.edu>, "Bestani, Robert" <robert.bestani.civ@ndu.edu>, "Boggs, Robert (CTR US NDU/NESA)" <boggsr@ndu.edu>, "Bucknam, Mark (CIV US NDU/NWC)" <mark.bucknam@ndu.edu>, [REDACTED]

"Cosentino, Guy (BG US-USA/NWC)" <guy.cosentino@ndu.edu>, "Curfiss, Dan (CIV US NDU/NESA)" <curfissd@ndu.edu>, "Dearing, Matthew (CIV US NDU/CISA)" <matthew.dearing.civ@ndu.edu>, Denise Natali <denise.natali@aus.org>, "Devine, Michael" <michael.devine@ndu.edu>, "Eliaison, William" <william.eliaison@ndu.edu>, "Eltsov, Peter CISA" <peter.eltssov\_ctr@gc.ndu.edu>, "Eltsov, Petr (CIV US CISA)" <petr.eltssov@ndu.edu>, "Gill, Jack (CIV US NDU/NESA)" <gillj@ndu.edu>, "Gordon, Carey (CIV US NDU/ES)" <carey.gordon@ndu.edu>, "Gresh, Geoffrey (CIV US GC)" <geoffrey.gresh@gc.ndu.edu>, "Hammes, Thomas" <thomas.hammes@ndu.edu>, "Hooker Jr, Richard (DR US CIV/INSS)" <hookerr@ndu.edu>, "Jalali, Ali (CIV US NDU/NESA)" <jalalia@ndu.edu>, [REDACTED]

"Lamm, David (CIV US NDU/NESA)" <lammd@ndu.edu>, "Lamson, Brian (COL US NDU/CISA)" <brian.lamson@ndu.edu>, "Lepse, James (CIV US NDU/ICAF)" <james.lepse@ndu.edu>, "Lynch, Thomas" <thomas.lynch@ndu.edu>, "Myers, Desaix" <myersd7@ndu.edu>, "Pindilli, Giovanni" <giovanni.j.pindilli.civ@gc.ndu.edu>, "Rostow, Nicholas" <nicholas.rostow@ndu.edu>, "Rupert, Michael CISA" <michael.rupert@gc.ndu.edu>, "Snodgrass, David (COL US USA/NWC)" <david.snodgrass@ndu.edu>, "Wolff, Terry (CIV US NDU/NESA)" <terry.wolff@ndu.edu>, [REDACTED] "Bauman, Kris (Col US USAF/INSS)" <kris.bauman@ndu.edu>, "Cope, John" <copej@ndu.edu>, "Einaudi, Luigi" <einaudil@ndu.edu>, "Hoffman, Francis (CIV US NDU/INSS)" <frank.hoffman@ndu.edu>, "Lamb, Christopher" <lambc@ndu.edu>, "LeSage, Andre (CIV US NDU/INSS)" <lesagea@ndu.edu>, "McBride, Dennis" <dennis.mcbride@ndu.edu>, "Michel, Leo G." <michellg@ndu.edu>, "Natali, Denise (CIV US NDU/INSS)" <denise.natali@ndu.edu>, "NDU-INSS-Research Directorate <ndu-inss-researchdi@ndu.edu>", "Outzen, Richard (COL US USA/INSS)" <richard.outzen@ndu.edu>, "Przystup, James" <przystupj@ndu.edu>, "Saunders, Phillip (CIV US NDU/INSS)" <saundersp@ndu.edu>, "Stipanovich, Susan (CIV US NDU/INSS)" <susan.stipanovich@ndu.edu>, "Wells, Linton" <wellsl3@ndu.edu>, "Yung, Christopher" <christopher.yung@ndu.edu>, [REDACTED]

<maria.effendi@ndu.edu>.

"Kangas, Roger (CIV US NDU/NESA)" <kangasr@ndu.edu>

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"Wood, John (CIV US NDU/NEA)" <john.wood2@ndu.edu>

<james.h.baker16.civ@mail.mil>

"Baker, James H SES (US)"

"Yvette CJCS-CAG Branch (yvette.e.branch.civ@mail.mil)"

<yvette.e.branch.civ@mail.mil>, daniel.chiu@osd.mil, "DesRoches, David, CIV, OSD-POLICY" <david.desroches@osd.mil>, "Dumont, Mike DASD-AfPAK" <michael.dumont@osd.mil>, jonathan.reiber@osd.mil, "McMillan, Joseph SES OSD POLICY" <joseph.mcmillan@osd.mil>, "OSD-POLICY Thomas Parker (thomas.parker@osd.mil)" <thomas.parker@osd.mil>, "Addabbo, Michael OSD-P" <michael.addabbo@osd.mil>, "Bajraktari, Ylli CIV OSD POLICY" <ylli.bajraktari@osd.mil>, "Brown, Cooper CIV OSD POLICY" <cooper.brown2@osd.mil>, "Daniell, Jonathan D CIV OSD POLICY" <jonathan.daniell@osd.mil>, DATT Dhaka LTC Doug Kelley <daodhaka@state.gov>, "Greenwood, Thomas C CIV OSD POLICY" <thomas.greenwood@osd.mil>, "Huschke, Griffin W CIV OSD POLICY (US)" <griffin.w.huschke.civ@mail.mil>, "Ipsen, Peter J CIV OSD POLICY (US)" <peter.j.ipsen.civ@mail.mil>, "Latif, Amer, CIV, OSD-POLICY" <amer.latif@osd.mil>, "Moskowitz, Elisa S CIV OSD POLICY (US)" <elisa.s.moskowitz.civ@mail.mil>

peter.roadly@osd.mil, "Richardson, Ashley R CIV OSD POLICY (US)" <ashley.r.richardson10.civ@mail.mil>, "Shear, David B. HON ASD" <david.b.shear5.civ@mail.mil>, "Tankel, Stephen M CIV (US) OSD-P" <stephen.m.tankel.civ@mail.mil>, "Velz, Peter M CIV OSD POLICY (US)" <peter.m.velz.civ@mail.mil>, "Wallar, Nicholas C CIV OSD POLICY (US)" <nicholas.c.wallar.civ@mail.mil>, "Walsh, Jennifer PDASD AfPAK" <jennifer.walsh@osd.mil>, "Wise, Jay OSD-APSA (john.wise@osd.mil)" <john.wise@osd.mil>, "Allan, Scott H D/STATE" <allansh@state.gov>, "Brunstetter, Scott NCTC" <scotthb@nctc.gov>

"Flynn, Mike DIA (Michael.flynn@dodis.ic.gov)"

<michael.flynn@dodis.ic.gov>

"Nick Rasmussen (nichojr@nctc.gov)" <nichojr@nctc.gov>

"O'Neal, Kevin M" <onealkm@state.gov>

"Rassler, Don A CIV USA USMA" <don.rassler@usma.edu>

adriennj@nctc.gov, Ben Fernandez NCTC <benjaminf@nctc.gov>

"Brunner, Mark COHEN GRP (mbrunner@cohengroup.net)" <mbrunner@cohengroup.net>

"Bryson, Becca" <rebecca\_a\_bryson@nsc.eop.gov>

"Carpenter, Jonathan D-SRAP (Carpenterjj@state.gov)" <carpenterjj@state.gov>

"Cronin, Audrey

GMU" <acronin2@gmu.edu>, "Danaraj, Ranjini" <ranjini\_t\_danaraj@nsc.eop.gov>

"Holmes, David" <david\_a\_holmes@nsc.eop.gov>

"Schrepel, Dawn" <dawn\_m\_schrepel@nsc.eop.gov>, "DeHart, James D-STATE AFG"

<dehartjp@state.gov>

"Donovan, Jason" <jason\_a\_donovan@nsc.eop.gov>, "Epstein, Stephen M (NEA/IR)"

<epsteinsm@state.gov>, "Feldman, (FeldmanDF@state.gov)" <feldmandf@state.gov>

"Fernandez, Katherine Berglund" <fernandezkb@state.gov>

"Goldrup, Stephen P" <goldrupsp2@state.gov>, "Hayeslip, Shaun DOS-ISBN" <hayeslipsd@state.gov>

"Hodgkinson, David NCTC" <davidbh2@nctc.gov>, "Jacobsen, Heather N" <jacobsenhn@state.gov>

"Jacobsen, Lance E DATT-DHAKA" <jacobsenle@state.gov>

"Eggers, Jeff" <jeffrey\_w\_eggers@nsc.eop.gov>

"Khan, Shehzi S INR" <khanss@state.gov>

"Kliene-

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Ahlbrandt, Stephanie" <ska@usip.org>, "Koontz, Bryan D/STATE" <koontzbk@state.gov>, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] "Lebson, Eric"  
<eric\_m\_lebson@nsc.eop.gov>, "Lenderking, Timothy A" <lenderkingta@state.gov>, "Johnson, Lisa"  
<lisa\_a\_johnson@ovp.eop.gov>, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] "Neil LLNL Joeck (joeck1@llnl.gov)"  
<joeck1@llnl.gov>, [REDACTED] "Newbill, Michael  
A." <michael\_a\_newbill@nsc.eop.gov>, POL India Team <polindiateam@osd.mil>, "Pratt, Tom"  
<robert\_t\_pratt@nsc.eop.gov>, "Talwar, Puneet" <puneet\_talwar@nsc.eop.gov>, r.shah@usaid.gov,  
"Rohn, Douglas DOS-INR" <rohndc@state.gov>, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] "Schwemlein, James SRAP" <schwemleinjc@state.gov>, "Shah, Alpa"  
<alpa\_m\_shah@nsc.eop.gov>, "Spykerman, John D" <spykermanjd@state.gov>, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] "Salikuddin, Tamanna"  
<tamanna\_salikuddin@nsc.eop.gov>, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] "Viechnicki, Peter NCTC" <peterdv2@nctc.gov>, "Shah, Alpa"  
</o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group /cn=recipients/cn=alpa\_m\_shah">, "Newbill, Michael A."  
</o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group /cn=recipients/cn=michaela.newbill23175718">, "Schrepel,  
Dawn" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group /cn=recipients/cn=dawn\_m\_schrepel">, "Donovan,  
Jason" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group /cn=recipients/cn=donovan, jason a.efd">, "Bryson,  
Rebecca" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group /cn=recipients/cn=bryson, rebecca a.a1a">,  
"Salikuddin, Tamanna" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group  
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/cn=recipients/cn=robertt.pratt17283652">, "Eggers, Jeff" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group  
/cn=recipients/cn=jeffrey\_w\_eggers">, "Holmes, David" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group  
/cn=recipients/cn=david\_a\_holmes">, "Johnson, Lisa" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group  
/cn=recipients/cn=lisa\_a\_johnson">, "Talwar, Puneet" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group  
/cn=recipients/cn=puneettalwar04813386">, "Danaraj, Ranjini" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative  
group /cn=recipients/cn=danaraj, ranjini t.743">, "Lebson, Eric" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative  
group /cn=recipients/cn=ericm.lebson57142151">  
**Subject:** South Asia and al Qaeda --- Bin Laden Bookshelf Documents and the Question of Jihad in  
Pakistan

Dear Fellow South Asia Analysts, Counterterrorism Colleagues and Friends:

Below, please find what I've published today on website War on the Rocks regarding my review and assessment of several of the recently declassified bin Laden documents about the nature of jihadist interactions in Pakistan.

My conclusion: It's not a jihadist-to-Pakistan conspiracy, it's just damned complicated.

For your consideration and comment.

Best,

Tom

Thomas F. Lynch III, Ph.D.

Distinguished Research Fellow

Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS), National Defense University (NDU)

Lincoln Hall - Room 2623; Fort Leslie J. McNair

Washington, D.C. 20310

202-685-2231

<http://inss.ndu.edu/Experts/ThomasLynch.aspx>



# WHAT BIN LADEN'S BOOKSHELF TELLS US ABOUT JIHAD IN PAKISTAN

Thomas Lynch

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<http://warontherocks.com/2015/06/what-bin-ladens-bookshelf-tells-us-about-jihad-in-pakistan/?singlepage=1>



Western authors, most notably journalist Carlotta Gall in her early 2014 book, *The Wrong Enemy*, and more recently, Seymour Hersh in a much ballyhooed article, "[The Killing of Osama bin Laden](#)," have written that senior Pakistani intelligence and military figures knowingly hid bin Laden and actively worked to sustain his organization, al Qaeda, within Pakistan. Adding to the notion that bin Laden and al Qaeda remained in Pakistan with state support after fleeing Afghanistan in early 2002 has been a [series of Pakistani press releases](#) hinting that Pakistan's premier intelligence outfit, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Agency, conspired with the United States government to both identify bin Laden's hideout and then to deliberately orchestrate failure of Pakistan's air defense system for the period of time necessary for U.S. special operators to conduct a raid into and out of Abbottabad.

For such claims to be true, there must have been a clever and well managed conspiracy of actions between senior al Qaeda leaders, including bin Laden, and the leadership of Pakistan's military and intelligence outfits. Former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morrell [denies any such conspiracy](#). Perhaps newly declassified material from bin Laden's bookshelf can shed some light on the details of such an



elaborate and effective cabal?

Three documents from this collection offer useful insight into the relationship between al Qaeda and Pakistani groups and outfits. None lends credence to the hypothesis of an elaborate conspiracy between bin Laden's operatives and Pakistani security leaders to first safeguard and then betray the legendary leader of al Qaeda. Instead, they provide corroboration for the standing scholarly narrative about [Pakistan and the al Qaeda network](#). This is a narrative that suggests a very complex and variable relationship between Pakistani jihadist groups and global jihadist networks that are tolerated rather than directed by state security entities. It also is a narrative that allows for second-or-third degree of separation interactions between low-level Pakistani intelligence operatives with the front-men for international groups like al Qaeda, but without any high-level choreography.

The first document, entitled, [Lessons Learned following the fall of the Islamic Emirate](#), is most important. In it, we learn that al Qaeda did have a pre-9/11 relationship with Pakistan-based jihadist groups, including the Pakistani nationalist-jihadist group we know as Lashkar-e-Tayyibah (LeT). It is unclear precisely what the al Qaeda-LeT relationship consisted of beyond a kindred belief in Salafi-jihadist ideology. However, it is clear that the authors of this lessons learned document felt that LeT failed al Qaeda badly during the American invasion of Afghanistan and subsequent crackdown against al Qaeda operatives and other international jihadists in Pakistan during 2002-03. Nine of the 18 lessons learned in this two page document highlight the relational complexity and double dealings amongst al Qaeda operatives, LeT, and those who had "penetrated" jihadist groups from the ISI:

"...6) The arrest of ((Abu Zubaydah)), due to our opening up so much to Lashkar-e Tayyiba or to use the phones and the Internet.

7) The arrest of the Yemeni group, due to the excess in their departure, their communications, and their outward appearance that differs from the outward appearance of the [others]. [NOTE: Reference to an arrest in Pakistan by ISI]

8) The arrest of Firas and Waqqas, due to finding that they had weapons. [NOTE: Reference to an arrest in Pakistan by the Pakistan Intelligence Bureau, IB, with assistance from ISI]

9) The arrest of ((Abu Yasir)), due to his excess in responding frequently on the Internet, or the treachery of Lashkar-e Tayyiba...

11) The arrest of ((Abu al-Mundhir)), due to observing him in Mir Ali. He was arrested after he left Banu, Allah knows...

13) The killing of Nawwab and his family after not heeding warnings that he received prior to his death and due to his openness to people and his refusal to leave Mir Ali and to change his penetrated crew, God knows. [NOTE: Reference to failure of Nawwab to react when his location and protective crew were penetrated by ISI associates]

14) The arrest of ((Abu al-Faraj)) due to his lack of precaution when his associate was late and didn't come, with this being the first time that he sent someone as his deputy. [NOTE: Refers to arrest of Abu al-Faraj al-Libi by ISI in Pakistan in early 2002 who then escaped only to be arrested again by ISI in 2005 and sent to GTMO]

15) The arrest of Sharifallah al-((Masri)) due to his interactions with individuals he knew to be penetrations with contacts to ISI.

16) The killing of 'Ikrimah (Var.: 'Akramah) and his brothers... [NOTE: Reference to a raid against Somali al Qaeda operatives by Pakistani police and intelligence operatives]

Among the papers that Osama bin Laden felt worth keeping with him, this two-page lessons learned document served as a constant reminder for him that Pakistan's ISI could not be trusted, and that any close association between al Qaeda and LeT was fraught with danger for the degree to which LeT was "penetrated" by the ISI. This document casts great doubt on the prospect that bin Laden's al Qaeda would be working closely with ISI as part of some elaborate hideout conspiracy between 2002 and 2009 that suddenly turned into a double-cross sometime around 2010-2011.

The second document, [UBL to Atiyah](#), constitutes bin Laden's note to his most trusted operational manager at the time of its writing, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman. This early 2011 letter directs Atiyah to terminate operational activities in western Pakistan and move to a location near Abbottabad to formulate al Qaeda's operational and media strategy for exploitation of the unfolding Arab Spring. But it is bin Laden's detailed instructions for how Atiyah should travel from Waziristan that merits attention. Bin Laden directs:

Upon your receipt of my letter, your administrative work in Waziristan will end, and you are to appoint the person (NFI) to succeed you. You will quickly make arrangements for your safe travel from your area to Peshawar and its suburbs till



such time we arrange for you a quiet house in the area that we are in...

Importantly, there is no bin Laden instruction for Atiyah to contact a trusted Pakistani security or intelligence agent, and no reference to any easy transit route from Waziristan to Abbottabad. Instead, there is an aura of danger associated with this move that bin Laden cautions Atiyah to remain mindful of. There also is a bin Laden allusion to a process for finding Atiyah a "quiet house" near Abbottabad that will take some time to consummate — presumably by a friends-and-friends-of-friends set of interactions, not by calling-in some standing chip with the local ISI station chief. There is no intimation that any inside connections with the Pakistani security services might somehow make the move of such an important associate less risky or dangerous within Pakistan.

The final document is a [letter dated 5 April 2011](#) from an unnamed al Qaeda operative to bin Laden discussing options for moving [bin Laden's son Hamzah](#) into Pakistan from Iran. It offers a fascinating delineation of the dangers anticipated and precautions to be taken. Three separate routes for Hamzah's travel in Pakistan are discussed, and all of them are assessed to be fraught with grave risk. Nowhere in the correspondence does the author reference a special contact within the Pakistani intelligence agencies or a third-party cutout from Pakistan's security services who might be available to assure this most special "guest" might make it safely to see his father. Oversight? Possible, but unlikely. More likely, the absence of any mention of such a "fixer" is another strong indication that bin Laden and al Qaeda operated in the shadows around Pakistan, fearful of discovery by Pakistan's security leadership, but working clandestinely through a series of complex relationships between groups with general sympathy for global jihad and with a knowledge that a low profile would inhibit any vigorous pursuit by Pakistan's intelligence services except under the most rare of circumstances. The author also writes:

Sorry to inform you that more than two months ago, brother ((Abu al-Harith)) al

-Sindi (the brother-in-law of Abu 'Abdallah al-Sindi) was detained by the Pakistani

intelligence in Karachi. So far I did not get any responses from the family of B M

(TN: sic) in spite of the fact that I received a response from brother Abu 'Abdallah

al-Sindi and Khalid's identification documents that I told you about earlier. Brother,

'Abdallah al-Sindi did not give any more details, but promised to soon send the phone numbers that we asked him for.

.... Also we started transferring ten million rupees to brother Aslam. Of course, there are lots of expenses that we paid for in rupees directly in support of several

jihadi groups in the tribes (Shura Shamali, Ms'udis, Khalifah Haqqani, Tehrik e

-Taliban Pakistan, and others. This is in addition to groups of immigrants) [sic]

because we have to support people...

So one of bin Laden's trusted operatives reports that Pakistan intelligence is harassing a key affiliate in Sind Province, and reports funding militant tribes like the Shamali, the Mesuds, the Khalifa Haqqani and the Tehrik-e-Taliban — all of whom were waging an active terrorist campaign against the Pakistani state. Again, it is very hard to square these operational details with a simultaneous cunning al Qaeda-Pakistani security forces relationship.

Certainly, the picture one gets from review of just these three documents is far from complete. As noted by other analysts, the bin Laden documents release is not yet a comprehensive record of what



was found in Abbottabad. There are more documents to come in the future. There is also a possibility that U.S. government translators and censors have redacted passages in these released documents that could offer a stronger indictment of Pakistan security agent complicity with bin Laden's al Qaeda. This possibility should not be dismissed out of hand.

Yet, what these documents show remains far more consistent with a picture of complexity and uncertainty in the relationships between global jihadist groups like bin Laden's al Qaeda and the myriad of nationalist-jihadist, anti-Hindu, anti-western and sometimes even anti-Pakistan jihadists proliferate across Pakistan. They demonstrate [a pattern of duplicity, obfuscation and negligence](#) found in Pakistan's own official report on the matter of bin Laden in Pakistan as far more credible than one of complicity and conspiracy between a global jihadist group like al Qaeda and the Pakistani security apparatus.

For now at least, we should remain willing to accept the conventional wisdom about al Qaeda's longstanding presence in Pakistan. It's not a conspiracy, ladies and gentlemen, it's just damned complicated.

*Thomas F. (Tom) Lynch III is a War on the Rocks contributor. He is a distinguished research fellow for South Asia and the Near East at the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies where he researches, writes and lectures on the legacy of terrorism and the trajectory of radical Islam. The opinions expressed in this commentary represent his own views and are not those of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or the United States government.*

Photo credit: [Sajjad Ali Qureshi](#)