



How The Osama Bin Laden Letters Help Obama

Seized documents show Obama's goal of 'destroying' al Qaeda is on track

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President Barack Obama arrives to address troops at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan.

Documents seized by U.S. commandos during the raid that killed Osama bin Laden revealed the al Qaeda founder wanted to kill President Barack Obama. But in an ironic twist, experts say bin Laden's final writings could give Obama a boost in his re-election fight against presumptive GOP nominee Mitt Romney.

"The reason for concentrating on them is that Obama is the head of infidelity and killing him automatically will make [Vice President Joseph] Biden take over the presidency for the remainder of the term, as it is the norm over there," bin Laden wrote in one of nearly 20 documents analyzed by the Army's Countering Terrorism Center. "Biden is totally unprepared for that post, which will lead the U.S. into a crisis."

But it was Obama who signed off on the risky raid that nabbed bin Laden, and experts say the president's reliance on such raids are a growing part of his war against al Qaeda. Experts say the seized bin Laden documents show the raids played a role in creating a less-lethal al Qaeda.

Here are three ways the writings of the world's former most-wanted terrorist should help Obama on the campaign trail:

'Destroying' al Qaeda. Since taking office in January 2009, The Obama White House has talked much more about crushing al Qaeda than the Taliban, who have been the terror group's hosts-turned-war comrades. Such rhetoric is increasing as Obama's time line for removing most U.S. troops in 2014 draws closer. For instance, in a major address Tuesday from Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, Obama stated "our goal is to destroy al Qaeda." The president and senior aides this week pointed out a long-term security pact with Afghanistan signed this Wednesday that gives Washington the ability to pursue the terror syndicate inside Afghanistan for another 10 years.

The documents released Thursday showed bin Laden, at the time of his death, remained a prominent al Qaeda figure—but they also paint a portrait of a frustrated commander who had lost control of his organization and his jihadist movement. Bin Laden's strategic wishes and orders were regularly questioned by his subordinates, and al Qaeda's central leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan was losing influence.

"Al Qaeda-central has been pretty badly degraded," says Joshua Foust of the American Security Project. "I think they maintain the ambition to resume the global logistics and planning network they had in the 1990s, but that's been pretty thoroughly smashed."

With the terror cell that planned and oversaw the 9/11 attacks, which prompted the U.S. war in Afghanistan, experts say the bin Laden letters will strengthen Obama's campaign-trail message about his withdrawal plan.

Smaller U.S. Footprint. Under Obama's orders, the military will remove around 33,000 U.S. troops by September. That will bring the total American military footprint in Afghanistan to about 68,000—but Pentagon and Obama administration officials remain tight-lipped about how many U.S. forces will be required to train Afghan forces and help them with things like commando raids, air strikes and intelligence gathering after Dec. 31, 2014.

Experts say Romney favors a larger American presence than the sitting commander in chief does in Afghanistan through 2015 and beyond. The bin Laden raid, carried out by a small commando team with a small supporting cast, "vindicates the argument that we didn't need 100,000 troops there to go after al Qaeda," says Christopher Preble of the CATO Institute. While Obama is responsible for the size the U.S. presence in the country when he sent the additional 30,000 troops in 2010, he clearly now favors a smaller force.

In poll after poll, Americans say they no longer feel the Afghanistan conflict is worth fighting, and want U.S. troops to come home as quickly as possible.

"Obama is aligning himself with the three-quarters of Americans that want this to end quickly," Preble says. On the other hand, "Romney has attached himself to the less-politically popular option. It's surprising that Romney continues to say he would advance a war that is growing more unpopular by the day.

And now Obama can point to the impotence of al Qaeda's central cell as evidence that a smaller U.S. presence can get the job done.

Drone Wars & Commando Raids. The Obama administration has increased the use of stealth and lethal special operations forces raids in Afghanistan to nab and kill al Qaeda and Taliban leaders and operatives. Raids similiar to the one that killed bin

Laden, which was carried out by a small team of Navy SEALs, allow U.S. officials to capture valuable terrorist leaders with—almost always—little collateral damage. Meantime, Obama is waging a very different kind of war in Yemen, using aerial drone strikes to take out Al Qaeda leaders and operatives.

Experts say the bin Laden letters show the special forces raids and drone strikes are taking a collective toll on al Qaeda's central cell in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as its affiliates in places like Yemen.

"The bin Laden raid was a big for the president," Preble says. "On top of the raid, you have his drone strikes and other special ops raids—and that means no U.S. troops on ground, which Americans really like."