

Description of the Abbottabad Documents Provided to the CTC

This document provides a general description of the 17 declassified documents captured in the Abbottabad raid and released to the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC). For additional context please see the documents themselves and/or the CTC's report "Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?" released in conjunction with this summary.

The 17 documents consist of electronic letters or draft letters, totaling 175 pages in the original Arabic and 197 pages in the English translation. The earliest letter is dated September 2006 and the latest April 2011. These internal al-Qa`ida communications were authored by several leaders, including Usama bin Ladin, `Atiyya `Abd al-Rahman, Abu Yahya al-Libi and the American Adam Gadahn, as well as several unknown individuals who were either affiliated with the group or wrote to offer it advice. Other recognizable personalities who feature in the letters either as authors, recipients or points of conversation include Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr, leader of the Somali militant group Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin; Nasir al-Wuhayshi (Abu Basir), leader of the Yemen-based al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); Anwar al-`Awlaqi; and Hakimullah Mahsud, leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Some of the letters are incomplete and/or are missing their dates, and not all of the letters explicitly attribute their author(s) and/or indicate to whom they are addressed. Given that they are all electronic documents either saved on thumb drives, memory cards or the hard drive of Bin Ladin's computer, except for the letters addressed to Bin Ladin, it cannot be ascertained whether any of these letters actually reached their intended destinations.

A Note on Translation:

The quality of the English translation provided to the CTC is not adequate throughout. When the translation was deemed inadequate, quotations cited in this report have either been amended or translated anew. Furthermore, the conversion of the dating of the letters from the Hijri to the Gregorian calendar is inaccurate in some places. The Appendix provides corrected dates to some of the letters, along with some pointers on how some letters relate to others. For those wishing to conduct their own analysis of

the documents, it is highly recommend to refer to the original Arabic documents, not the translations.

SOCOM-2012-0000003

This letter was authored by Usama bin Ladin and addressed to Shaykh Mahmud (`Atiyya Abdul Rahman) on 27 August 2010. Mahmud is specifically directed to tell “Basir,” who is Nasir al-Wuhayshi (Abu Basir), the leader of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, to remain in his role (presumably in response to a request from Abu Basir that Anwar al-`Awlaqi take his position), and for him to send “us a detailed and lengthy” version of al-`Awlaqi’s resume. `Atiyya is also told to ask Basir and Anwar al-`Awlaqi for their “vision in detail about the situation” in Yemen. References are also made in the letter to the 2010 floods in Pakistan, a letter from Bin Ladin’s son Khalid to `Abd al-Latif, al-Qa`ida’s media plan for the 9/11 anniversary, and the need for the “brothers coming from Iran” to be placed in safe locations.

SOCOM-2012-0000004

This document is a letter authored by the American al-Qa`ida spokesman Adam Gadahn to an unknown recipient and was written in late January 2011. In the first part of the document Gadahn provides strategic advice regarding al-Qa`ida’s media plans for the tenth anniversary of 9/11. The letter is in essence a response to many of the requests/queries that Bin Ladin makes in his letter to `Atiyya dated October 2010 (SOCOM-2012-0000015), particularly those concerning a media strategy for the ten-year anniversary of 9/11. In other parts of the document Gadahn incisively criticizes the tactics and targeting calculus of the Islamic State of Iraq (AQI/ISI) and the Pakistani Taliban (TTP); he strongly advocates for al-Qa`ida to publicly dissociate itself from both groups. The document concludes with a draft statement, which provides a candid assessment of these issues.

SOCOM-2012-0000005

This document is a letter dated 7 August 2010 from “Zamarai” (Usama bin Ladin) to Mukhtar Abu al-Zubayr, the leader of the Somali militant group Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin, which merged with al-Qa`ida after Bin Ladin’s death. The document is a response to a letter Bin Ladin received from al-Zubayr in which he requested formal

unity with al-Qa`ida and either consulted Bin Ladin on the question of declaring an Islamic state in Somalia or informed him that he was about to declare one. In Bin Ladin's response, he politely declines al-Shabab's request for formal unity with al-Qa`ida.

SOCOM-2012-0000006

This document is a letter believed to have been composed in December 2010 and its content relates to SOCOM-2012-0000005. The letter is addressed to Azmarai, perhaps a typo or misspelling of the nickname Zamarai (a nickname or *kunya* for Bin Ladin). While the identity of the author is unclear, the familiar tone and implicit critique of Bin Ladin's policy vis-a-vis al-Shabab suggest that this is from a high ranking personality, possibly Ayman al-Zawahiri. Referring to "our friend's letter" and the perspective of the "brothers...[who might have been] too concerned about inflating the size and growth of al-Qa`ida," the author of the document urges the receiver to "reconsider your opinion not to declare the accession [i.e. formal merger] of the brothers of Somalia..." This is clearly a reference to al-Qa`ida's potential merger with al-Shabab and suggests that al-Qa`ida's relationship with the "affiliates" is a subject of internal debate. If indeed the author of the letter is Ayman al-Zawahiri this could be an indication of a major fissure over a key strategic question at the pinnacle of the organization (for different interpretations of this letter, see Appendix of "Letters from Abbottabad").

SOCOM-2012-0000007

This letter is authored by Mahmud al-Hasan (`Atiyya) and Abu Yahya al-Libi and addressed to the *amir* of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Hakimullah Mahsud. It is dated 3 December 2010 and is sharply critical of the ideology and tactics of the TTP. The letter makes it clear that al-Qa`ida's senior leaders had serious concerns about the TTP's trajectory inside Pakistan, and the impact the group's misguided operations might have on al-Qa`ida and other militant groups in the region. The authors identify several errors committed by the group, specifically Hakimullah Mahsud's arrogation of privileges and positions beyond what was appropriate as the TTP's *amir*; the TTP's use of indiscriminate violence and killing of Muslim civilians; and the group's use of kidnapping. `Atiyya and al-Libi also take issue with Mahsud labeling al-Qa`ida members as "guests" and the attempts made by other groups (presumably the TTP) to

siphon off al-Qa`ida members. The authors threaten that if actions are not taken to correct these mistakes, “we shall be forced to take public and firm legal steps from our side.”

SOCOM-2012-0000008

This letter was originally an exchange between Jaysh al-Islam and `Atiyya that was forwarded first to a certain `Abd al-Hamid (and presumably to Bin Ladin later). The gist of Jaysh al-Islam’s letter makes it known that the group is in need of financial assistance “to support jihad,” and that the group is seeking `Atiyya’s legal advice on three matters: 1) the permissibility of accepting financial assistance from other militant Palestinian groups (e.g., Fatah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad); 2) the permissibility of investing funds in the stock market in support of jihad; and 3) the permissibility of striking or killing drug traffickers in order to use their money, and even drugs, to lure their enemies who could in turn be used by Jaysh al-Islam as double-agents. `Atiyya’s response, written sometime between 24 October 2006 and 22 November 2006, is cordial but distant, responding to the questions but refraining from giving any strategic advice.

SOCOM-2012-0000009

This document is part of a longer letter which was not released to the CTC. It is not clear who authored the letter or to whom it was addressed. It discusses the potential need to change the name of “Qa`idat al-Jihad.” The author is of the view that the abridging of the name “al-Qa`ida” has “lessened Muslims’ feelings that we belong to them.” The author is further concerned that since the name “al-Qa`ida” lacks religious connotations, it has allowed the United States to launch a war on “al-Qa`ida” without offending Muslims. The author proposed a list of new names that capture Islamic theological themes: *Ta’ifat al-tawhid wa-al-jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad Group), *Jama`at wahdat al-Muslimin* (Muslim Unity Group), *Hizb tawhid al-Umma al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Nation Unification Party) and *Jama`at tahrir al-aqsa* (Al-Aqsa Liberation Group).

SOCOM-2012-0000010

This letter is authored by “Abu `Abdallah” (Usama bin Ladin), addressed to “Shaykh Mahmud” (`Atiyya) and dated 26 April 2011 – a week before bin Ladin’s death. In it, Bin Ladin outlines his response to the “Arab Spring,” proposing two different

strategies. The first strategy pertains to the Arab World and entails “inciting people who have not yet revolted and exhort[ing] them to rebel against the rulers (*khuruj ‘ala al-hukkam*)”; the second strategy concerns Afghanistan and it entails continuing to evoke the obligation of jihad there. The letter also makes reference to a wide variety of topics including: the scarcity of communications from Iraq, “the brothers coming from Iran,” and hostages held by “our brothers in the Islamic Maghreb” and in Somalia. The document also briefly discusses Bin Ladin’s sons, his courier, Shaykh Abu Muhammad (Ayman al-Zawahiri), and other individuals of interest.

SOCOM-2012-0000011

This letter, dated 28 March 2007, is addressed to a legal scholar by the name of Hafiz Sultan, and it is authored by someone who is of Egyptian origin. The author makes it explicit that he was alarmed by al-Qa`ida in Iraq’s conduct and he urges Sultan to write to that group’s leaders to correct their ways. The author also asks for legal guidance on the use of chlorine gas, which he appears not to support. A reference is also made to “the brothers in Lebanon” and the need to arrange “to have one of their representatives visit us in the near future.” A message from the “brothers in Algeria” is also included.

SOCOM-2012-0000012

This letter dated 11 June 2009 was written by `Atiyya to the “honorable shaykh.” It is possible that it was addressed to Usama bin Ladin, but it may have been addressed to another senior leader. The majority of the letter provides details on the release of detained jihadi “brothers” and their families from Iran and an indication that more are expected to be released, including Bin Ladin’s family. It seems that their release was partially in response to covert operations by al-Qa`ida against Iran and its interests.

SOCOM-2012-0000013

This is a draft that formed the basis of a publicly available document, part four in a series of statements that Ayman al-Zawahiri released in response to the “Arab Spring.” Through the document one can observe al-Qa`ida’s editing process (reflected in the editor’s comments highlighted in green and in a bold font). While it is not clear if Bin Ladin himself did the editing, whoever did so has solid grammatical foundations and prefers a more self-effacing writing style than al-Zawahiri. The edits were not included

in al-Zawahiri's final speech which was released in a video on 4 March 2011 on jihadi forums. Of the 12 proposed corrections only one appears in al-Zawahiri's speech.

SOCOM-2012-0000014

This document consists of two letters addressed to "Abu `Abd-al-Rahman," almost certainly `Atiyya `Abd al-Rahman. It was sent by an operative who knows `Atiyya and is a religious student with ties to the senior shaykhs and clerics in Saudi Arabia. While the letters are not dated, their contents suggest they were composed soon after January 2007; they read very much like an intelligence assessment, designed to provide `Atiyya with some perspective on how al-Qa`ida generally, and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) more specifically, are perceived amongst Saudi scholars of varying degrees of prominence. The author provides `Atiyya with brief summaries of private meetings the author had with certain scholars, with the clear intent of evaluating the level of support that al-Qa`ida enjoys from some relatively prominent members of the Saudi religious establishment.

SOCOM-2012-0000015

This document is a letter dated 21 October 2010 from Bin Ladin to "Shaykh Mahmud" (`Atiyya). The letter is primarily focused on issues in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region. In the letter Bin Ladin specifically comments on: the security situation in Waziristan and the need to relocate al-Qa`ida members from the region; counter surveillance issues associated with the movement of his son Hamza within Pakistan; the appointment of `Atiyya's three deputies; various al-Sahab videos and the media plan for the tenth anniversary of 9/11; the release of an Afghan prisoner held by al-Qa`ida; and the trial of Faisal Shahzad. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Yahya al-Libi, Saif al-`Adl, and Adam Gadahn are also mentioned in the document.

SOCOM-2012-0000016

This document is a letter addressed to "Abu Basir" (Nasir al-Wuhayshi, leader of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula - AQAP) from an unidentified author, most likely Usama bin Ladin and/or `Atiyya. The letter is in part a response to specific requests for guidance from AQAP's leadership. The author specifically advises AQAP to focus on targeting the United States, not the Yemeni government or security forces. The author

also discusses media strategy and the importance of AQAP's relations with Yemen's tribes.

SOCOM-2012-0000017

This document is a series of paragraphs, some of which match the content found in SOCOM-2012-0000016. This document was likely written by the author of that document. This letter discusses strategy, the need for al-Qa`ida to remain focused on targeting the United States (or even against U.S. targets in South Africa where other "brothers" are not active), the importance of tribal relations in a variety of different countries, and media activity.

SOCOM-2012-0000018

This document is a letter addressed to Usama bin Ladin from "a loving brother whom you know and who knows you" and dated 14 September 2006. The author is critical of Bin Ladin for focusing al-Qa`ida's operations on "Islamic countries in general and the Arabian Peninsula in particular." He enumerates the numerous negative consequences of engaging in jihad inside Saudi Arabia, and informs Bin Ladin that people are now repulsed by the technical term "jihad" and even forbidden to use it in lectures. The author strongly advised Bin Ladin to change his policies.

SOCOM-2012-0000019

This document is a long letter authored by Usama bin Ladin after the death of Sheikh Sa'id (Mustafa Abu'l-Yazid) in late May 2010 and it is addressed to "Shaykh Mahmud" (`Atiyya) who he designates as Sa'id's successor. Bin Ladin's letter is concerned with the mistakes committed by regional jihadi groups, which have resulted in the unnecessary deaths of thousands of Muslim civilians. Bin Ladin indicates that he would like to start a "new phase" so that the jihadis could regain the trust of Muslims. He directs `Atiyya to prepare a memorandum to centralize, in the hands of AQC, the media campaign and operations of regional jihadi groups. Considerable space is devoted to a discussion about Yemen, external operations and Bin Ladin's plans for his son Hamza. This document includes an additional letter that Bin Ladin forwards to `Atiyya authored by Shaykh Yunis, presumably Yunis al-Mauritani, consisting of a new operational plan that al-Qa`ida should consider adopting.