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BIN LADEN: AN OPEN LETTER TO PETER BERGEN

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by B.Raman

(To be read in continuation of my article titled 'A New Weapon of Mass Destruction' at <http://www.saag.org/papers11/paper1019.html>)

Dear Mr.Bergen,

We have never run into each other in any of the innumerable seminars on jihadi terrorism in general and Al Qaeda in particular which I keep attending, but you are one of the few Al Qaeda watchers whose comments I carefully look for and read with attention and respect. Your comments are often tinged with a healthy dose of skepticism which, I have always felt, is an important component of good analysis.

2. Before going to bed on Thursday night, I leant from the TV channels about the latest audio-tape, purportedly of Osama bin Laden, which was posted on the Internet by his followers on December 16,2004, in which he has praised the terrorists responsible for the attack on the US Consulate in Jeddah on December 6,2004, and called for the overthrow of the Saudi ruling family, the intensification of the jihad in Iraq and the use of the oil weapon against the West.

3. I woke up at 3-30 on Friday morning to write my comments on bin Laden's speech. Before starting to type, I browsed the Internet to see what others have said on the subject. I was amazed to find that you have already said what I intended to write.

Great minds think alike!

4. Instead of typing my views, let me quote you for the benefit of the readers since I totally agree with what you have said. The CNN has reported as follows on your views:

5. Quote Terrorism expert Peter Bergen said the 10-day period between the Jeddah attack and the release of the tape is the fastest turnaround that he can recall between a news event and a communication from bin Laden.

"It indicates to me a certain degree of security," Bergen said on CNN's "Live Today."

"After all, the chain of custody of these tapes is the one way to find bin Laden. He obviously feels secure enough that he can release a number of these tapes."

"The last message from the al Qaeda leader came in a videotape appearing October 29 on the Arab-language television network Al-Jazeera. His top deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, spoke in an audiotape that aired November 29 on Al-Jazeera.

"Bergen said by his count bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have released 29 messages since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

"It's extraordinary that the chain of custody of these tapes has not been traced back," Bergen said. "After all, they're releasing these tapes very frequently, on average once every six weeks, yet it seems that American intelligence agencies or other intelligence agencies are not capable of tracing back the source of these tapes." (Citation ends)

6. Dear Mr. Bergen. Your observations and analysis are impeccable. I may add one observation of my own. bin Laden, who generally has his tapes---video or audio---released through the Al Jazeera TV channel, has chosen this time not to do so. At least, not yet. Instead, it has been disseminated first through the Internet. Why? Was the TV channel reluctant to carry it this time due to US pressure? Or was it because he thought the Al Jazeera office in Islamabad is under effective surveillance and that it would be risky to send it there?

7. As you have pointed out, bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have disseminated 29 taped messages since 9/11. As I have been pointing out repeatedly in my articles, almost all these messages were reportedly handed over by unidentified persons to the Al Jazeera correspondent in Islamabad or elsewhere in Pakistan

8. How come there has not been a single instance of interception of any of these couriers from Al Qaeda by the Pakistani

security agencies, which do not fail to spot and question a single Pakistani who visits the Indian Embassy in Islamabad? They have a more effective surveillance on the Indian Embassy and its staff than on bin Laden and his operatives and on Al Jazeera office, wherever it is located.

9. Who are the couriers used by Al Qaeda for carrying the tapes of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri to Al Jazeera correspondents without being intercepted by the Police or detected by the USA's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which has its own surveillance on Al Jazeera ? What is so special about them that they are able to evade detection so successfully?

10. Yes, Mr.Bergen. They are not ordinary couriers. They are special. Very special. They are the serving and retired officers of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), who have been helping bin Laden and al-Zawahiri to evade capture and to remain in touch with their followers. Naturally, nobody in Pakistan would dare to stop and search them.

11. You may want to ask: "How do you know this?" It is like asking: 'How do you know what I have under my underwear?'"

12. It is so obvious. It is such common knowledge in the police circles of Pakistan. You talk to the police officers of Sindh and Balochistan. They will tell you how a group of serving and retired officers of the ISI has been keeping bin Laden and al-Zawahiri alive and kicking and helping them to remain in touch with their followers.

13. During his recent visit to the US, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf was reported to have said in an interview that the trail for bin Laden has grown cold. It has not. It is there everywhere---from his hide-out wherever it is-- to the offices of the ISI, Al Jazeera and the GHQ in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and to the residences of retired ISI officers.

14. A trail is useful only if you notice it and act on it. If you consciously close your eyes to it, even the best trail will be of no avail.

15. Keep asking the right questions. You will find the truth unless, in the meanwhile, another catastrophe overtakes the USA. God forbid.

(The writer is Additional Secretary (ret'd), Cabinet Secretariat, Cabinet Secretariat, Govt. of India, New Delhi, and, presently, Director, Institute for Topical Studies, Chennai, and Distinguished Fellow and Convenor, Observer Research Foundation (ORf), Chennai Chapter. E-mail: corde@vsnl.com [1])

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