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Osama bin Laden is Dead: Maybe CIA Can Get Confirmation From "SNL"

Robert Weiner and James Lewis | Thursday 23 December 2010

Last week, al Qaeda issued its annual Christmas threat to the United States, promising suicide bombings during the holidays. Here's a better idea for a Christmas present from al Qaeda: a video showing Osama bin Laden - or his grave.

Is bin Laden dead or alive? Nobody seems to know for sure, or, if anybody does, he isn't saying. The White House's Afghanistan-Pakistan review this month didn't even mention him despite an ongoing, decade-long manhunt.

Here's what we know. On Oct. 27, after bin Laden supposedly demanded that France withdraw troops from Afghanistan, the French Foreign Ministry said the tape "can be considered established based on initial verification." U.S. intelligence agencies gave credence to the verification, not only refusing to put out a disclaimer, but letting their staffs back the authenticity of other recent tapes. Upon release of al Qaeda's Jan. 24 tape early last year, ABC reported that intelligence officials "can't verify the authenticity of the tape, but they say there has never been a fake and there is no reason to believe this one is not real." Likewise, CNN's reporting of a June 2009 tape concluded, "A CNN analysis said the voice does indeed sound like the leader of the terrorist network that attacked the United States on Sept. 11, 2001."

CIA reports, doctors and biographers have asserted that bin Laden had (has) a range of diseases from typhoid to renal disease, Addison's disease, secondary osteoporosis and Marfan syndrome. Intelligence agencies think that in 2000, he had kidney-dialysis devices shipped to him in Afghanistan. His 1987 biography states that bin Laden was being treated with insulin for diabetes and suffered serious low blood pressure. Is it likely that the most wanted man in the world has been regularly receiving medical attention without detection for the past 10 years?

In 2008, former CIA case officer Robert Baer asserted, "Of course he's dead." In 2002 and 2009, Pakistani Presidents Pervez Musharraf and Asif Ali Zardari separately stated that bin Laden was dead. In 2002, FBI counterterrorism chief Dale Watson stated that bin Laden "probably" was dead.

Since 2004, we have seen no new bin Laden videos; we've only heard audios. One video released in 2007 could be a compilation of older videos. So why does the intelligence community continue to support the impression that he's alive?

Everyone in America knows how spot-on impersonations can be. "Saturday Night Live" ("SNL") has been doing them for years. Without the glasses, Tina Fey is herself; with them, she is Sarah Palin. Even the cast had difficulty telling the difference and mixed them up when Mrs. Palin actually showed up. Amy Poehler's Hillary Clinton and Darrell Hammond's Bill Clinton have riveted late-night viewers for decades. Has Tina Fey met her match in al Qaeda?

Al Qaeda wants America and the world to believe bin Laden is still alive. His image is a specter of the horrors of Sept. 11, helping build public support for everything from troop surges a globe away to warrantless wiretaps at home.

But the image of bin Laden is getting moldy, and there's little reason for his ghost to scare anyone anymore. If al Qaeda wants America to believe bin Laden is alive, it should put up or shut up.

Here's a challenge to al Qaeda: Send a new video that can be analyzed properly. Otherwise, we'll take it all as a big scam, al Qaeda's version of "Saturday Night Live." Otherwise, you betcha, he's dead.

Robert Weiner is a former spokesman for the Clinton White House and the House Government Operations Committee. James Lewis is a national security analyst at Robert Weiner Associates.

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