

# New York Times Reporter: Obama Administration Lied on al Qaeda

## Yet Another Thing Obama Lied About

The new bin Laden documents make clear that there was intelligence politicization during the 2012 campaign.

| By [Jenna Liphits](#)

(MIR HAMID/DAILY DAWN/Gamma-Rapho, JIM WATSON/AFP, via Getty Images)

A top foreign correspondent at the *New York Times* said Friday that the Obama administration deliberately downplayed al Qaeda's strength in the run-up to the 2012 presidential election.

"The overall narrative that I think was being pushed to the press, and if you look back at the editorials that were done when that trove came out, was an image of bin Laden isolated, he had lost control of this group," Rukmini Callimachi said during an event at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, referring to the 17 hand-picked documents released by the Obama administration in May of 2012.

Her remarks triggered the following question from Kim Dozier, a former top correspondent for the Associated Press and CBS, and current executive editor of the Cipher Brief: "Do you think that

was something that was kept from the public's view because it revealed that there had to be reams of communication going back and forth, which means U.S. intelligence, Western intelligence, was missing this?"

"Think back to when bin Laden was killed. It was 2011, it was right before a major campaign season. I don't want to underplay the role that the killing of Osama bin Laden had," said Callimachi. "But I think that that was theorized into something much bigger."

"The head of the organization has been killed, and now—these are literally quotes that I would get: the organization has been 'decimated,' the organization is in 'disarray,' the organization is 'on the run,'" she continued. "At the same time that we were preparing to pull out troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, I think that it was important to portray this as a problem that no longer existed."

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The Trump administration released roughly 470,000 files in November that were captured in the Abbottabad raid. Only a few hundred were released under the Obama administration, despite one official's description of the haul as enough to fill a "small college library."

When Callimachi was covering West Africa in 2011, Obama administration officials and others told her that al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which had just taken over the northern half of Mali, "was actually not really connected to al Qaeda."

"The narrative I would get is that . . . it had opportunistically taken the al Qaeda name in order to have prestige and scare

people, and that in fact those people were just criminals," she said.

In 2013, after AQIM had been cleared out of the area, Callimachi began sorting through thousands of files that had been left in the city of Timbuktu. She discovered evidence that "central" al Qaeda commanders were actually "micromanag[ing]" the Malians who the Obama administration had said had no ties to al Qaeda.

"Suddenly, my worldview, which had been informed by officials . . . started to fall apart," she said. "Suddenly, I was seeing that this group that I was told really had no ties, with no connection . . . was in fact being micromanaged by al Qaeda central."

Callimachi said that the recently released documents from the bin Laden raid underscore the reality of the relationship between al Qaeda and its affiliates.

"In fact, the new trove that has now come out confirms very much what I was seeing in Mali, which is not just real connective tissue, but connective tissue to the point of [these affiliates] being micromanaged from Afghanistan and Pakistan," she said. "Very minor personnel decisions are being decided by the group thousands of miles away."

The newly released files, which panelists said represented the "digital life" of Osama bin Laden and his family, include bin Laden's personal journal, video of his son, Hamza bin Laden, audio reports on al Qaeda in Iraq, and communications about the Pakistani Taliban.

The Foundation for the Defense of Democracy's Thomas Joscelyn, who along with Bill Roggio has been pushing for the full release of bin Laden documents since 2012, said the administration attached a narrative to those files that al Qaeda was "on the decline" and that "there was no cohesion" among terror groups fighting from West Africa to the Middle East.

"That narrative that came out in 2012, we knew immediately was wrong, totally wrong, and was basically a cherry picked version of what's going on," he said.

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