



FBI Failed to Forward Hasan's E-mails to Awlaki

Major Nidal Hasan, the army psychiatrist accused of murdering 13 and attempting to murder 32 others during a November 5 shooting spree at Fort Hood, Texas, exchanged at least 18 e-mails with radical, jihad-promoting imam, Anwar Awlaki. Remarkably, the FBI only knew about two of them.



Given the bloody massacre committed by a soldier whose surging extremist views seem to seep from between the lines of these letters, the painful and perplexing question remains: Could Hasan had been stopped in time had intelligence agencies reviewed the entirety of his correspondence with the radical cleric?

While such speculation is a typical companion of mourning, there is a question that is more crucial to obviating such a horror from ever recurring. Why, in light of all the inter-agency cooperation that was one of the chief goals of the post-9/11 intelligence overhaul, did the FBI drop the ball so deplorably and with such fatal effect?

National Public Radio (NPR) has published a review of the FBI's handling of the case beginning in December 2008 when Hasan e-mailed Awlaki for the first time. According to that report, the San Diego office of the FBI took the lead in the investigation. Agents there asked colleagues in the Washington, D.C., office to help them collate and catalog the file on Hasan. So far, so good. Surely intra-office cooperation will be smooth. Not so fast.

The special agent in Washington assigned the case waited three months to follow-up with the San Diego office on the Hasan file. Inexplicably, the Washington agent's due diligence didn't include asking the San Diego office if they had collected any additional information on Hasan's interest in suicide bombing and becoming a soldier of Allah serving in the infidel army. Not to be outdone in the malfeasance department, the San Diego office figured it didn't need to send a revised dossier to the Washington office because having heard nothing from them, they reckoned the bureau in Washington had everything it needed to make an informed evaluation of the matter.

It didn't. As stated earlier, the Washington, D.C. agent reviewed two out of 18 e-mail messages sent from Hasan to Awlaki. Even a cursory scan of the 16 additional e-mails would have revealed to the FBI that Hasan's probing of the imam's interpretations of Islam were becoming more and more specific with regard to the spiritual classification of a Muslim soldier who kills his comrades in the name of Allah.

One such soldier was especially interesting to Hasan. On the morning of March 23, 2003, at Camp Pennsylvania, Kuwait, Sergeant Hasan Akbar tossed hand grenades into a tent filled with sleeping members of the 101st Airborne Division. In the attack, Akbar murdered two soldiers in his own unit and wounded 14 others. Akbar, a convert to Islam, was convicted by a military tribunal of two counts of



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premeditated murder and was sentenced to death.

The facts surrounding the Akbar murders are very similar to the Hasan case. Both men expressed the desire to not be deployed in a theatre where they might be called upon to fire upon fellow Muslims. Rather than turn a weapon on terrorists and their allies, both men chose instead to murder their fellow soldiers in cold blood.

In his later e-mails, the ones notoriously not forwarded to Washington by San Diego, Hasan asked Awlaki if he believed that Sergeant Akbar was a hero for having killed those that might soon be killing Muslims. We don't know how Awlaki answered his acolyte, but in hindsight, such a query is eerily foreshadowing of Hasan's own rampage against troops awaiting deployment to the Middle East.

Witnesses of the November 5 attack report that as he climbed on a table and began spraying gunfire, Hasan repeatedly shouted, "Allahu Akbar!" or "God is great!" Surveying the tenor and timing of the e-mails Hasan sent to a cleric known to espouse violence against "American aggressors," it should be asked, "Were the pointed questions posed therein merely scholarly research by a professional psychiatrist (as claimed by the FBI), or was each one a crescendo of war cries by a self-proclaimed "Soldier of Allah?"

Would possession of these very suggestive e-mails have changed the course of history? Would there be 13 people alive today had the FBI not bungled their investigation and handling of the data? That is impossible to say and frankly of little comfort to the families left without loved ones. But if such senseless and perhaps preventable loss is to be avoided in the future, those most responsible for not checking Hasan when they had the chance must be held accountable for their apparent ineptitude.



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