



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 5, 2012

## Leaked E-mails Suggest bin Laden Not Buried at Sea

Austin, Texas-based Stratfor is a very well-connected organization described by WikiLeaks as “a company that fronts as an intelligence publisher, but provides confidential intelligence services to large corporations, such as Bhopal’s Dow Chemical Co., Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and government agencies, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Marines and the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency.” The company’s vice president for intelligence, Fred Burton, a highly experienced counterterrorism expert with many contacts in the U.S. government, was the originator of most of the e-mails concerning the disposition of bin Laden’s body in the hours after his death.



Bin Laden was allegedly killed near Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011, just after 1:00 a.m. local time. President Barack Obama announced bin Laden’s assassination on May 1 at 11:35 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (May 2 had not yet arrived in the United States).

At 5:26 a.m. Central Daylight Time on May 2, Burton sent out an e-mail with the subject “OBL” (Osama bin Laden) [stating](#): “Reportedly, we took the body with us. Thank goodness.”

Twenty-five minutes later he sent [one](#) with the subject “Body bound for Dover, DE on CIA plane.” The text read: “Than [sic] onward to the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Bethesda.” (“Technically this would have meant the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, since the AFIP operations were folded into Walter Reed as part of a consolidation plan,” explained [Jason Ditz](#) of Antiwar.com, adding that if confirmed, “it would add yet more intrigue to Dover Air Force Base, already under enormous scrutiny for its mishandling of corpses and disposal of remains at a Virginia landfill.”)

At 6:26 a.m. Burton [stated](#) that he “doubt[ed]” that bin Laden’s body had been “dumped at sea,” adding, “We would want to photograph, DNA, fingerprint, etc.” “His body is a crime scene,” he continued, “and I don’t see the FBI nor DOJ letting that happen.” He suggested that burying the body at sea would be reminiscent of the cremation of Nazi Adolf Eichmann’s body following his capture, trial, and execution, the purpose of which was to prevent anyone from building a memorial to him.

Stratfor CEO George Friedman agreed but noted that “Eichmann was seen alive for many months on trial before being sentenced to death and executed,” then cremated. “No comparison with suddenly burying him at sea without any chance to view him which i [sic] doubt happened,” he added.

Obviously neither of these highly connected men with plenty of inside sources had yet bought into the idea that bin Laden had been sent to Davy Jones’ locker. Indeed, at 1:36 p.m. Burton was still of the opinion that bin Laden’s body was being taken to the United States, writing: “Body is Dover bound,



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should be here by now.”

By 3:11 p.m., however, he appears to have changed his mind, [e-mailing](#): “Down & dirty done, He already sleeps with the fish.” But he noted the difficulties that this course of action would create, saying, “It seems to me that by dropping the corpse in the ocean, the body will come back to haunt us.”

Although bin Laden’s corpse hasn’t haunted the United States much thus far, the release of the Stratfor e-mails will likely revive the debate over just what happened to bin Laden’s body and, consequently, whether or not U.S. forces actually killed the terrorist mastermind in the first place. Secrecy prior to the raid is understandable; a refusal to produce the key piece of evidence that the raid was successful, on the other hand, is quite curious indeed.

The Obama administration claimed it had buried bin Laden at sea in an effort comply with Islamic tradition, which requires washing, shrouding, and burial within 24 hours of death. However, “a number of scholars have said such an action is appropriate only under ‘extraordinary circumstances’ — and that bin Laden’s death did not qualify,” CBS News reported at the time.

Moreover, observed the [Guardian](#): “The 24-hour rule has not always been applied by the U.S. in the past. For example, the bodies of Uday and Qusay Hussein — sons of the Iraqi dictator — were held for 11 days before being released for burial.”

Another theory behind the sea burial was that, as in the case of Eichmann’s cremation, dumping the body into the deep would prevent his grave from becoming an inspiration to other terrorists.

This theory also seems to be applied selectively. “Saddam Hussein was treated to traditional Islamic burial rites and interred in a compound he had built for himself near his birthplace,” [Slate](#) wrote. “When detainees die at Guantanamo Bay, either through suicide or natural causes, the Pentagon repatriates the remains to their home countries, where the funerals often become scenes of anti-American protest.”

One might argue that bin Laden’s was a special case likely to inspire devotion on the part of Islamic militants and that as a result, his burial at sea was appropriate. The *Guardian*, though, dismisses such notions: “Fears about Bin Laden’s burial place turning into a shrine for Islamists were probably unfounded, since the Wahhabi/Salafi tradition rejects such things. Even Saudi kings are buried in unmarked graves.”

Given all this, more people are likely to question whether bin Laden was killed on May 2 and whether his body was plopped into the Arabian Sea shortly thereafter. Very little evidence of a successful operation against bin Laden has been produced; and what evidence existed at the time continues to dwindle. Besides the mysteriously disappearing corpse, the compound in which bin Laden was supposedly killed was [demolished](#) last week.

The Obama administration apparently expects the world to accept its version of events on faith alone — a kind of trust it has hardly earned over the past three years. But with the release of the Stratfor e-mails, which suggest that bin Laden’s body was not buried at sea (or at least not as quickly as the administration maintained), what many consider to be Obama’s one certified foreign policy achievement may well be called into question just as he is seeking reelection. Then again, if dead people can vote in Chicago, why couldn’t the supposed corpse of bin Laden play a role in the reelection or ouster of a President with roots in the Windy City’s political machine?

Photo of Osama bin Laden: AP Images



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