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ANWAR AL-AWLAKI, YEMEN, AND AMERICAN COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY

A Conversation with
New York Times Reporter Scott Shane

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RIEDEL: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Brookings Institution. My name is Bruce Riedel. I'm the Director of the Intelligence Project at the Brookings Institution and I'm here today with Scott Shane to talk about his terrific new book, *Objective Troy: A Terrorist, A President, and the Rise of the Drone*. This book is terrific in many ways. I found it very hard to put down. It's one of those genuine page-turners where you can't really walk away from it until you finish it all up. It's also unique I think. I've written a few and read dozens of books about terrorism today. I think this is the first book that ever got sex into the terrorism story and that is a unique accomplishment and we'll come back to that in a few minutes.

It's also a very important book because it deals with a critically important issue, the question of whether the executive authority of the United States, the President, should have the right to execute, kill, an American citizen without due process, without going to court. It's not just an American question. The first country in the world to start using drones to kill people was Israel. We were the second. The United Kingdom is now in the same process. I was in London this weekend and in classic British tabloid style, they reported the Royal Air Force now used a drone to kill a British citizen, raising all of the same questions that were raised when Anwar al-Awlaki was killed a few years ago.

So in one sense it's the story of the drone. It's also the story of a terrorist, Anwar al-Awlaki, born in the United States of America in New Mexico who then turned out to be one of the leading operational planners of al-Qaida, or at least that's the story of the administration. We'll come back to that as well.

I think it's also a story of a president, a president who as you say in the book found drones to be the solution to many of the very difficult moral and legal and operational and practical questions he confronted in dealing with the issues of counterterrorism.

So we're going to cover all of those issues today. Let me just briefly go over the format. I'm going to have a conversation with Scott for a while, ask him a number of questions about the book. In about 40 minutes I will open it up to you and ask you to raise questions as well. We're not here specifically to talk about the crisis in Yemen today during the discussion about the book, but if people want to talk about Yemen as well when we open it up for questions from the public, we'd be happy to do

that as well. So that's the format. I will ask you when you ask the question to please identify yourself and your affiliation.

So with that as a starter, let me ask you a really simple, but a very important question to start with. Who was Anwar al-Awlaki and why did you think he needed to have a book written about him?

MR. SHANE: Thanks, Bruce, for the easy opening question and for having me at Brookings and to all of you for showing up. Anwar al-Awlaki in a nutshell was by far the most prominent and influential recruiter, English language recruiter, for al-Qaida in its history, a really powerful influence, and as Bruce noted at the end, also an operational planner for al-Qaida in Yemen. But what I think most fascinated me about him is that he took a journey that a lot of people have taken before reaching the stage of plotting violence against civilians. He was American born. He spent his first seven years in the states while his father was a graduate student and a young professor. He then went back with his family, with his parents, to Yemen and was there from age 7 to age 19 when his father sent him back to the states as a college student. His father was later agriculture minister and chancellor of a university, founder of another university in Yemen, a very prominent guy, and a huge fan of the United States of America. He still to this day has very warm feelings towards the United States and warm memories of his years in the states.

So he came from that kind of a family and his father sent him with the idea that would get an engineering degree, become a kind of technocrat, follow in his father's footsteps, and do something to help his very poor country. For those who don't know much about Yemen, it's got about the same population as Saudi Arabia. It's right next to Saudi Arabia on the Arabian Peninsula, but just doesn't have the oil and, therefore, has a per capita income less than half that of the Saudis. It's the poorest country in the Arab world before all the current troubles.

So that was the future his father envisioned and Anwar took a kind of turn off the road. He found himself bored with engineering at Colorado State. He took a real interest in Islam and found that he had a knack for preaching, and to his father's dismay became a preacher of Islam. He was very successful in three American mosques and very successful on CDs. He was very pro-American in some ways. You can find sermons and lectures in which he essentially praises American exceptionalism and praises religious freedom in this country.

So what fascinated me about him is that this guy ends up spending his last years plotting to kill Americans, declaring war on America. And so I thought if I could understand this guy's evolution, it might shed light on the larger problem that we face. The other side of that problem, which is counterterrorism, what do you do about it? I think his story has a lot to say about that as well.

MR. RIEDEL: One of the aspects of his life that you deal with, and you do it in a very interesting way, is the question did he know the 911 hijackers? Did he know what they were doing? Was he part of the plot? And what I like about it is you laid out the case for yes and the case for no. Can you run us through that a little bit because I think that's a part of this story that's very important?

MR. SHANE: Sure. After 9/11 the FBI, of course, was scrambling to understand who were these guys who hijacked the planes? And they quickly discovered that two of them had been living in San Diego -- this is a famous story, of course -- had been living openly under their own names in San Diego for more than a year. They had prayed at a little mosque in San Diego where Anwar al-Awlaki had been the imam. And when they went obviously in great haste and talked to members of that congregation, some people thought they remembered one of the hijackers sort of closeted with al-Awlaki in his office having private conversations. So this was quite alarming. Al-Awlaki had moved on to a much bigger, more prestigious mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, right outside D.C., one of the big D.C. mosques. And so they thought is this guy somehow in on the plot? Was he part of a support network for the hijackers that we missed? And that was a question subsequently raised by the 9/11 Commission as well.

So the case for the prosecution would be that al-Awlaki had been exposed to and embraced with great enthusiasm -- freshman year it turns out -- a very puritanical, Salafi-brand of Islam. His roommate who was Saudi told me this amazing story about how he came back from going home to Saudi Arabia during the Christmas holidays freshman year and his fun-loving Yemeni roommate had been turned into this kind of puritanical person who took his TV, the Saudi guy's TV, at one point and smashed it on the ground because he didn't like the movie that his friend was watching. And it turned out that over the Christmas holidays, sort of stranded on the Colorado State campus, Anwar had fallen under the influence of some brotherhood types, some very puritanical grad students, and he kind of had the zeal of the convert. So he had been exposed to that brand of Islam.

It turned out that in 1999 actually the FBI had opened a terrorism investigation of al-Awlaki because he had met with a couple of people who were on the FBI's watch list and they wanted to check him out. They closed that investigation before 9/11, but there had been these suspicions. There were a few other connections that I won't go into, but there was this concern, which as I said the 9/11 Commission very much kind of revived in 2003 when they were looking into all of this about could Anwar al-Awlaki have been sort of the mentor or coach for those hijackers in San Diego? Ultimately the FBI decided that was not the case, somewhat perhaps self-serving since they hadn't detected it at the time, but I actually concluded the same thing that this guy was not a terrorist, not a sleeper agent for al-Qaida.

And there are lots of reasons to believe that and a couple that I will mention. One is I got his younger brother to dig out some emails that he'd exchanged with Anwar in the days after 9/11 in which Anwar tells his brother that he thought the attacks were horrible. So he was saying privately to his most intimates, friends and family members, the same thing he was saying publicly.

And there's another reason to believe. He was completely shocked and surprised by the 9/11 attacks, which he denounced. But I think the ultimate clincher in this argument to my way of thinking is later on after Anwar al-Awlaki became famous for other reasons and was all over the Internet and all over YouTube. He was not a modest fellow and I think if he'd been in on the most successful al-Qaida attack, jihadist attack, in the history of the world, he would have found a way to mention that. So I think ultimately sort of his ego is the proof that he wasn't in on the plot.

MR. RIEDEL: Well, you brought the FBI up. They dropped one investigation, but then in the course of the years after 9/11 they begin to detect strange behavior -- well, I won't say strange -- potentially criminal behavior in another field -- we've waited 15 minutes to get sex into the story, so that's long enough that now we can start to talk about it -- his seeming addiction to prostitution.

MR. SHANE: Yeah. The FBI after discovering his connection to these hijackers not surprisingly went to his home and to the mosque and interviewed him three or four times in the days immediately after, in the first two weeks I guess, after 9/11. And he gave all the proper answers. He denounced 9/11, said he had no idea. He vaguely remembered one of the hijackers, but they weren't close and so on.

But he was also somewhat wary. When they asked him to get his passport, he declined,

presumably fearful that they would just grab it and hang on to it for months. And when they asked him if he ever preached about jihad, he declined to answer interestingly. Now, I have to say with the level of sophistication about Islam that most of the FBI agents had who were going out on this frantic hunt in those days, that might have been a fairly shrewd thing to do because to get into a complicated answer about jihad in the days after 9/11 and to say "Yes, I preach about jihad," that could have been a short trip to jail.

So anyway, they were still concerned about him. They weren't totally satisfied and they ordered 24 hour surveillance, monitoring of his phone, and so on. And what they discovered in the ensuing months, following him literally every time he drove away from home, every time he took the Metro or walked somewhere, people were watching him, taking notes, taking pictures. And what they discovered over the ensuing months was there was absolutely no indication that he was tied to al-Qaida or to terrorism or militancy. But he did on a weekly or biweekly basis arrange through escort services a visit to prostitutes in hotels in the D.C. area. And completely unbeknownst to al-Awlaki, which I guess is hats off to the FBI surveillance squad, they were recording all of this stuff. I don't think they started out with any particular interest in his sex life, but they were following him and they didn't know where he was going and he'd go to all these hotels and meet with women. And they often would interview the women afterwards and find out what he said. He said he was a computer programmer from India, but he didn't reveal any secret plots to blow up the White House.

So it turns out that as inconsequential in a way as his visit to prostitutes might have seemed, I discovered that in some ways the course of his life really turns on that issue. Because what happened was in March 2002 there were some raids in Northern Virginia and other places, but mainly in Northern Virginia, on Islamic institutions, and it was part of a terrorist financing investigation. But by all accounts the raids were very heavy handed and some of them targeted very mainstream old Islamic institutions. They didn't come up with much and in some cases they -- in one case they burst into the home and handcuffed an older lady who was married to an official at one of these institutions I think to a radiator. They wouldn't let her cover her hair for 4 hours while agents went through the house. And this kind of thing as you can imagine in a conservative Muslim community in Northern Virginia caused a lot of outrage.

So al-Awlaki actually gave a sermon that was very fiery -- like everything else, you can still find it on YouTube -- and he actually for the first time said, “This is a war on Islam. They’re not just targeting radicals. They’re targeting all of us.” But he also raised the example of African Americans and he said, “In this country you have to fight for your rights. African Americans didn’t get their rights until they stood up for them. Muslims have to stand up for their rights.”

Anyway, a few days after that he takes off for the U.K. and basically doesn’t come back. Comes back for one visit a few months later, but he basically has left the U.S. And so the assumption has been that he just got fed up with the wave of anti-Muslim sentiment and the heavy hand of the government after 9/11 and he just said, “I can’t take this.” But in my reporting it turned out that his younger brother had met with him, was visiting him at the time. And after that sermon had asked him, “Hey, Anwar, when are you coming back to Yemen?” And Anwar’s answer was basically, “Never. I’m having a great life here.” He’d been quoted in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. He’d been on PBS. He was sort of becoming a media star. He was actually becoming the figure that he had described in a sermon at one point where he said that “American Muslims should be the bridge between the United States and a billion Muslims worldwide.” He was really kind of playing that role, beginning to play that role. He was an ambitious guy. He was loving the limelight. He was loving his life in America. They liked the restaurants in Washington. They liked the Smithsonian. He had three kids and a wife.

So everything was going great and he told his brother, “I’m here for the duration as far as I know.” And that disappointed his brother. Then suddenly a couple of days later, his brother goes to evening prayers at the mosque and he finds Anwar, usually a very relaxed, collected, confident guy, totally discombobulated, totally shattered, ashen. And his brother won’t tell him what’s wrong at that time, but the next day he takes him to a private place, asks him to take the batteries out of his cell phone and he does the same, and tells him that he had just learned the day before that the FBI had a big file on him that could destroy his life and that he’s thinking about leaving the U.S. for good.

So what I discovered by beating up the National Archives and finally getting a document declassified from the 9/11 Commission documents was that what had set that off was not the discovery that the FBI had a big file on terrorist connections because the FBI didn’t. He had been warned by one of the managers at one of these escort services that the FBI had visited and that they knew all about his

visits to prostitutes. Now in context you've got to realize that this guy is a conservative Muslim preacher with a conservative congregation who has preached thunder in true Southern Baptist style against fornication -- you can still find that on the Web, too, Google al-Awlaki and fornication -- and had denounced the stuff on TV and in Hollywood and so on. And so to be exposed as a regular visitor to prostitutes as a married man would have been if not the end of his career as a cleric or close to it as well as obviously a disaster for his family. And he said, "I can't take it," and he flew off to the U.K.

MR. RIEDEL: Then he goes on from the U.K. to Yemen and starts working for al-Qaida in two fields really, one the operational side. But in many ways more importantly I think in the long run in what we call it when we do it, the public diplomacy side; when someone else does it, the propaganda side. And he comes up with the idea for *Inspire Magazine*, which makes him the figure that has outlasted his life in many ways. Can you describe a little bit that transition because here's a man who really has no experience in the terrorism world now suddenly becomes perhaps the most articulate spokesman for terrorism?

MR. SHANE: Well, I should say at first that the evolution of the transition took quite a while. He leaves the U.S. in March 2002, comes back for a visit in October 2002 where it's pretty clear he's kind of exploring the possibility of whether he can get his life back on track in America and what the FBI is going to do about the prostitution stuff. He decides he just can't make it in the U.S. So he essentially settles in the U.K. with frequent visits to Yemen for a couple of years. He follows much more radical circles there -- this is before the 2005 London bombings -- and the level of rhetoric that's tolerated is very high.

One thing you can say about Anwar al-Awlaki is he's a very talented guy, was a very talented guy, and a very ambitious guy. By then he was realizing he was not going to be the bridge between the United States and a billion Muslims worldwide, so what else could he be? His knowledge -- he was very well steeped in Islamic history and he found a very receptive audience to his stories and lectures about Islamic history. And in the U.K. he began to use some of these ancient stories almost in an allegorical way as a safe way to talk about the issues of the present, and in particular to talk about jihad that way, but not about jihad of al-Qaida, but jihad back in the 7th century and so on.

From there he goes to Yemen. Again in the view of his family, he was blocked by the

authorities from taking certain paths. So he's actually locked up by the Yemeni authorities for a year and a half without charge in Sana'a, in the political prison in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. And that is at least partly -- not only was it about his intervention and travel dispute, American officials have acknowledged to me in the Bush Administration that the Yemenis asked them, "This is an American citizen. We've got this American citizen. What do you want us to do with him?" And basically the Americans said, "You know what? We wouldn't be unhappy if you kept him locked up," which is a somewhat outrageous thing. It's an American citizen. The government, instead of sticking up for this guy and making sure that his rights are respected, are saying, "You know, don't ask us about him for a while." And subsequently, eventually the family, as I indicated is quite prominent, they were lobbying the whole time. Eventually he gets out after a year and a half. Still is being followed around and harassed by the security forces in Sana'a, moves to his family's ancestral village in the tribal lands of Yemen in Shabwa Province, turns out to be where al-Qaida is hanging out. By then he's almost certainly already made contact with al-Qaida and the rest is history.

But I would say his family is I think exaggerating when they saw he became a terrorist because his other paths were blocked. I mean there are a lot people whose paths are blocked by one thing or another who don't become terrorists. But I do think that he had this kind of burning ambition. He wanted to make his mark. He wanted to be prominent. And I really do think looking back at his story that there were other possibilities. He could have remained and become even more of a sort of prominent figure in American political life, perhaps the best option. But in these intervening years he experimented with various investments with his dad's money. He invested in real estate in Yemen, lost the money. He had the idea of starting a language school. He was working on his Ph.D. for a time and there was actually a formal offer that if he completed his Ph.D., he could become a professor of education in Sana'a.

So there were all these other options that were sort of falling by the wayside, and I think ultimately for all kinds of complicated ideological and personal reasons, he realizes there's only one place he can really make his mark and that's with al-Qaida, and he turns out to be very good at what he does.

MR. RIEDEL: I think it's issue 3 or 4 of *Inspire Magazine* where he wrote about the Arab Spring, one of the most in retrospect provocative and insightful articles anyone wrote about the Arab

Spring in which he entitled “The Tsunami of Change” at a time when everyone in the West at least was hoping that this was a tsunami that was going to bring democracy and reform to the Middle East. He said, “It’s going to be a victory for al-Qaida.”

Can you give us a little bit of the flavor of why this Colorado State graduate got such a good handle on being able to speak and persuade people that they should go out and commit terror and murder and things like that?

MR. SHANE: That’s sort of the core question that I tried to grapple with in the book and I don’t know that I really have the answer, but it did shed a lot of light for me. I guess I’d answer it in a couple of ways. One is that he was equally fluent in English and Arabic and I’d say equally at home in Yemen’s conservative Muslim culture and in American culture. And if you spend a little time on YouTube, you can kind of see this. The language of his al-Qaida work was overwhelmingly English. Towards the end he did some videos for al-Qaida, for the media branch of AQAP in Arabic, but his language was almost always English.

I’ve kind of come to think of him as a brand in the world of jihad, just the way Toyota may be a Japanese company and Apple may be an American company, but basically they function as global companies in English as sort of the international language of commerce. And so he had that going for him, but he also had lived as a Muslim in America.

He had had his adolescence in conservative Muslim Yemen and then come back to an anything-goes-college campus in Colorado. And so I think he understood very well the tensions that Muslim Americans feel, the pressures they’re under to prove their loyalty -- are you Muslim or are you American -- and he really can push that button. And I think if you go back and watch his stuff, particularly if you Google “al-Awlaki call to jihad” where he does an English language video where he’s wearing the traditional Yemeni dagger, but also this kind of camo jacket, sort of saying “I’m a warrior,” which he was not. Part of the message is he’s directly speaking to American Muslims saying, “This is why it’s your religious obligation to attack.”

And I think the other thing I’ll say is that a concept that really helped me understand the inexplicable, which is why do people in the name of religion want to kill tens or hundreds or thousands of strangers? What is that about? How is that possible? And then how are those people lionized as

heroes? And the concept of the Ahmad and the way it is treated by folks like Anwar al-Awlaki helped me understand it. His pitch was basically that your loyalty as an American Muslim, as a French Muslim, as a Pakistani Muslim, is not to the United States or France or Pakistan. That's secondary. Your obligation, your primary obligation is to the Ahmad, to the global community of Muslims, to the believers, and that comes first. So if your fellow believers are under attack, you have to come to their defense. There's no hemming and hawing. That is your religious obligation and you have to take lives, endanger your own life, in order to do that.

Now that can seem quite nutty, but we are all familiar with and accepting of the notion that the kid who goes off and joins the Marines and fights in Iraq or fights in Afghanistan and perhaps kills civilians in those places, comes home and is treated as a hero. And certainly it's considered impolite and insulting to spend too much time on how many civilians were there in your bombing runs or whatever. I mean we can kind of understand this concept. So if his audience switches its loyalty, its patriotism so to speak, from a country to the religion and to his brand of the religion, you can kind of understand how he can turn that switch and turn these kids who we read about every other week flying off to join ISIL or plotting to blow up the neighborhood bar, you can kind of understand what's happening there.

MR. RIEDEL: Let's switch focus for a little and look at it from character number two, the President's eyes. By the time he's publishing *Inspire Magazine*, he's also engaged in other things. Describe for us if you can a little bit how the White House's trajectory and the CIA's trajectory switches from maybe he had something to do with 9/11 -- we have a lot of his sorted side of life -- but now we're moving towards the decision to actually do something about this and ultimately the decision to kill him.

MR. SHANE: Well, as early as 2008 there began to be an awareness that this guy was a problem, almost entirely through no one was claiming he was an operational terrorist at that point, but people in the FBI say that every time they arrested somebody in the states, a kind of wannabe terrorist, for plotting some kind of violence, they would look -- and this began as early as 2006 -- they would look at the laptop and there would be a long queue in the history of al-Awlaki videos, of al-Awlaki lectures and sermons and so on. And by then he has a package of lectures, which is really kind of the redoing of an older set of lectures called "Constants on the Path to Jihad," in 2005 became very, very popular. Later on he did "44 Ways to Support Jihad." You see almost the beginnings of the *Inspire Magazine* mentality.

That's click-bait, right, "44 Ways to Support Jihad," everybody wants to click on that.

So he was beginning to be recognized from his hideout in Yemen as a significant figure. After being released from prison he'd started a Website and started a Facebook page, so he was out there. And the FBI was finding, as one investigator told me, not just in some cases, but in every case they would find al-Awlaki's influence as a significant contributor to the path that these people they're arresting had taken. So the American officials were beginning to pay attention and beginning to get worried about him.

But it was really Fort Hood when Nidal Hasan, that Army psychiatrist, shot up Fort Hood and killed 13 people in November 2009 and then when they looked at it, they realized he'd prayed in al-Awlaki's mosque in Falls Church. He had then engaged through al-Awlaki's Website -- there was an "ask the sheikh" thing where you could click on it and submit questions to al-Awlaki. And so it turned out that he had written repeatedly to al-Awlaki and al-Awlaki had sent back just a couple of noncommittal answers, probably a little worried that this might be a trap of some kind.

But at the same time on his blog he had written about any Muslim who served in the army of the enemy, essentially the American army, other infidel armies I think he said, "Was worse than a shameless beast" or something. But clearly while not directing any of this in emails to Nidal Hasan, Nidal Hasan was all over his Website all the time. He was sending the message that if you're in the enemy army, you should be ashamed of yourself. You only have one option and that's to join the Muslims who are fighting against those who are oppressing Muslims.

So suddenly the attention of the authorities was riveted on Anwar al-Awlaki and it was extremely embarrassing and something you will remember. The FBI had to explain how we had intercepted some of these emails, but what had happened to them and there were Congressional investigations. But still at that point it did not appear from that case that Anwar al-Awlaki was operational. It turns out that they had been monitoring some communications between al-Qaida figures and al-Awlaki for some time, at least since the beginning of 2009 I was told.

But really it was the underwear bomber on Christmas Day in 2009. As you remember the young Nigerian who tried to blow up a plane from Amsterdam over Detroit. The bomb didn't go off. He was arrested. And he eventually named al-Awlaki as first of all the guy who he had gone to Yemen to

find. He was one of a whole class of young Muslims who was inspired by this guy and actually went to try and find him in al-Qaida in Yemen. And al-Awlaki was the one who had sorted vetted him to see if he was worthy of a mission, decided he was, and then hooked him up with the bomb maker who fitted him with this underwear bomb. And al-Awlaki -- Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the young Nigerian, told the FBI -- had given him the instruction, "Make sure you're over U.S. soil before you blow up the plane."

So at that point the U.S. authorities considered him to be not just a propagandist, but an operational terrorist and that made him eligible so to speak -- strange word -- for the kill list and Obama ordered the lawyers to look into whether this would be legal and a process began that ended with him being put on the kill list.

MR. RIEDEL: Conceivably, the White House had other options. A drone strike is a permanent solution, there's no question about that. But they could have gone to the Yemeni authorities, asked that he be arrested, held. You also raised, I think quite rightly, they could have launched a counternarrative against him, including exposing his sex life. Instead they fixed on one solution and then when they embarked on it, when they carried that solution out, what is most striking to me is how poorly they justified the argument in the public domain. And it took your book really to come along and actually make the case that you would have thought the Obama Administration would have wanted to make the day after as to why this fellow was a dangerous terrorist and why he is a threat to the United States of America. To me it's kind of a -- how did they get sucked into one outcome?

MR. SHANE: Well, I mean at the time he came this close in a sense to killing 300 people on U.S. soil. And politically in researching the book I went back and kind of relived 2009, Obama's first year in office. Dick Cheney's out there it seems like every week saying, "This President has made the country unsafe" because he wants to close Guantanamo, because he ended the harsh interrogation tactics and close the secret jails. And had 300 people died at the end of Obama's first year in office, I think it's fair to say that the political impact would have been huge and that the Republican narrative that they had set up would have seemed quite convincing to a lot of people. And I think the Obama folks understood that, too, the administration understood that, too.

So there was a sense of both political and sort of operational danger and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudi/Yemeni branch based in Yemen, was emerging as the most dangerous

threat to the U.S. They had learned that this sort of genius bomb maker named al-Asiri, a Saudi bomb maker, was experimenting with ways to get bombs through airport security. This was I think really terrifying to counterterrorism officials. They had these different options. They'll say that it was considered to be infeasible -- and this was actually part of the legal argument -- to capture Anwar al-Awlaki, to capture anybody in Yemen's tribal lands, was considered too dangerous to do.

I think one option that does not seem to have been fully explored that was definitely an option in Yemeni society was to make a deal with the tribe. I mean the al-Awlaki Tribe is al-Awlaki's tribe, his name derives from the name of his tribe. Tribal folks are open to negotiation and it's quite conceivable that they could have negotiated a sort of handover and he could not have hidden from the tribe where he was.

So there might have been options, but one of the things you realize, one of the things I realized in writing this book, is the way technology shapes history. Once the armed drone and its capabilities had been illustrated, as they had been first at the end of the Bush Administration and then certainly under Obama, if you ask what the real options were, meaning in Washington-speak the political options, was it really possible say to send SEAL Team 6 into Yemen to get this guy at 2:00 in the morning?

As it turned out he wasn't that far from the Saudi border. He was in a pretty wild area. It maybe would have been possible, but a very dangerous mission. He and the guys with him would have fought to the death if they could have. So you could easily have ended up with al-Awlaki dead and a couple of SEALs dead. You can imagine the reaction in Congress -- do you mean to tell me that this administration, knowing that it could kill al-Awlaki with a drone and put no American lives at risk, instead decided to risk the lives of these brave SEALs? There would have been no end to it. So I can assume that that was not a favorite option for the administration to consider.

MR. RIEDEL: Just to put a footnote here, I was interviewed by the attorneys that were prosecuting him, the Nigerian, Abdulmutallab, to be the expert witness when they brought him to court. So I talked to them a lot and I asked them at one point, "How did he pick Detroit?" And there was a lot of, "Well, we really don't want to answer that." Finally I broke them down. I'm a professional intelligence officer, so I know how to get things out of you. And finally somewhat sheepishly they admitted well, when

he went to the travel agent where he bought the ticket, he had a certain amount of money and the travel agent said well, with only that amount of money there's actually only one city in America you can fly to. So I'm very sorry if anybody here is from Michigan, but Detroit turns out to be the cheapest place in the United States. That probably says a lot about Detroit.

He's dead, but in many ways his influence is even more powerful from beyond the grave than he ever would have been in his life. His name continues to be linked to terrorist attack after terrorist attack. In the end the $64 million question of your book, were we better off getting rid of Anwar al-Awlaki or could we have come up with a different way of dealing with him that might have ensured that he didn't become this iconic figure in the world of al-Qaida and terrorism?

MR. SHANE: Well, setting aside the legal debate over whether it was legal and constitutional to kill him, which I'm not really qualified to take a strong position in. But I did, with the help of a constitutional law professor, I did a little poll of constitutional law professors. And it came out just about one-third, one-third, one-third legal and constitutional, not legal and constitutional, or it depends. So there still seems to be a good bit of disagreement in the legal community about this.

But I certainly understand the temptation, the appeal, of just doing away with this guy, especially when you have a drone to do it. And I think the sense in the White House in the days after he was killed was job well done, we don't have to worry about that guy anymore. He's out of the picture. He was believed by the intelligence agencies, and I think this is basically true, to be the sort of head of a small cell of people within al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula that was focusing on the external enemy, the far enemy, America.

He and another American named Samir Khan who was the sort of hands-on editor of *Inspire Magazine*, and al-Asiri, the bomb maker, were all sort of this little unit that was mostly focused on the far enemy. And so to take out al-Awlaki looked like a great idea. Maybe these guys will focus on the enemies closer to home and to some degree that appears to have taken place, although there were plots aimed at the U.S. after al-Awlaki was killed.

So I can understand the appeal, but what I don't think people fully reckoned with is basically the Internet. This guy had become famous as a propagandist through the Internet or as an expert in public diplomacy as Bruce would say, a diplomat for al-Qaida. He'd become famous through the

Internet. He was sort of an early adopter of a series of technologies. He had his kid brother on the sidewalk at the San Diego mosque, selling cassette tapes of his sermons and lectures. That then became as many of you know boxed sets of CDs, a 53-CD set on the life of the prophet Muhammad, which by all accounts is extremely well done. And you will still find some, perhaps hidden away in a cabinet now, in the homes of many Muslims in the U.S. and U.K. and Canada.

Then when the Internet comes along he uses something called Paltalk from Yemen to address large groups of people around the world. He creates a Website, creates a Facebook page, but ultimately I think YouTube is his home. And these days you can find him, to this day and the number varies from day to day, but somewhere around 40,000 videos on YouTube ranging from his early career that are sort of mainstream lectures on Islamic history all the way to the call to jihad.

And so what I think Obama was not really thinking of on September 30, 2011, when he first announced in the morning that al-Awlaki was dead and then later gave a radio interview in which he sort of did a little bit of a victory dance, I don't think he was fully taking into consideration -- and I certainly wasn't -- that in religious terms al-Awlaki, in terms of al-Qaida certainly and his admirers, he had just made Anwar al-Awlaki a martyr and that this martyr was all over the Internet and would speak with greater authenticity and greater authority than he ever had before.

And not only would the call to jihad be out there, but also all that mainstream stuff. You can Google Anwar al-Awlaki and marriage and listen to the sheikh talk in English about marriage, what makes a good marriage in Islam. Before, that was just "Anwar when he was in the states talking about marriage." Now it's "that preacher of Islam, Anwar al-Awlaki, who was martyred by the United States, who was murdered, who was killed by the United States." So all that material that once might have been seen as completely innocuous and incapable of radicalizing anybody I think now operates in this sort of charged field when it is a sign of what America did to him.

And so his influence turns up I would say in a majority of the cases of English-speaking Muslims who are charged either with terrorism or with trying to fly off and join ISIS. You almost always if you go back into their laptops you'll find Anwar.

MR. RIEDEL: A fascinating story. There are even juicier parts that I haven't gone into because we don't want to give the whole story away. But what I'd like to do now is ask you to identify

yourself and ask questions both about Anwar al-Awlaki, the drone strike, but also we can turn to the question of Yemen itself. I think we have microphones, so if you'll raise your hands and wait for a minute for the microphone to get to you -- the young lady right there.

QUESTIONER: Hey, Scott. Mary Louise Kelly, a fellow journalist, not *The Atlantic*. I notice in your acknowledgments you graciously thank Ben Rhodes at the White House for talking to you, but you otherwise have some quite sharp words for the Obama Administration in terms of the roadblocks that they threw up against your efforts to report this. I'm curious. Was this a different experience than your daily reporting at the *Times*, and if you'd tell us a story or two about your efforts to ferret out information and the administration's efforts to block you?

MR. SHANE: Well, of course Mary Louise would ask that question because she covered intelligence for NPR and has been down this road and has suffered the same frustrations that all of us have and particularly with the Obama Administration in recent years. Yes, I do in the fine print of the acknowledgements take a couple of shots at the Obama Administration because I am both frustrated and puzzled by what I see as the unnecessary and excessive secrecy that surrounds a lot of this stuff. And, of course, it's been made worse by the unprecedented number of prosecutions of government and former government employees for disclosing classified information to the press. In some cases perhaps inevitable and justified when we think about the unprecedented scale of the leaks -- Wikileaks by Bradley-now-Chelsea Manning and by Edward Snowden about NSA -- but there were a bunch of marginal cases as well where people were criminally charged.

I mean as a national security reporter, you tend to meet government officials and even former government officials in the kind of DMZ, in the kind of gray zone, which is very wide between classified and unclassified information. And frankly no one knows what's classified in this border land. Michael Hayden who ran the drone program as CIA Director said a couple of years ago that he no longer knows what is classified and what's not when it comes to drones because on the one hand it's a covert action program in Pakistan that no one is supposed to know about. On the other hand the President of the United States has talked about it publicly on a number of occasions. So it's very murky, but what's happened is fewer government employees are willing to take the risk of meeting you in that gray zone and talking.

Two people who I would have loved to have talked to for this book -- I guess I can say because it's known --Petraeus and Hoss Cartwright, the former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, would have been great interviews for my book. They declined to talk and it might have been related to the fact that both of them were under active FBI leak investigations at the time I was doing my reporting.

But it's not just that. As Bruce mentioned, you would expect that when it was going to take this unprecedented step of ordering the killing, essentially the execution without trial, of an American citizen, that the administration would have wanted to make a public case and it had the wherewithal to do that. It had material showing, for example, that Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab had said a lot about al-Awlaki's role in the Christmas underwear bombing plot. I am now fighting in court after two years of fruitless negotiation with the FBI and denials. I'm fighting to get copies, redacted copies, of the interview summaries of the FBI with Abdulmutallab who's now serving life without parole. He's serving life in prison, so his trial is long over. But they will not give me those interview summaries. Why were those interview summaries not on national TV at the time of his killing? Why were the hundreds of pages that tragically I had to plow through documenting his encounters with prostitutes not out there long ago? At least when he was playing the role of a puritanical preacher of Islam, why was it not made available perhaps through some respected Islamic institution so you wouldn't have the sort of Uncle Sam taint to it? But I mean it really was true that this guy was a complete hypocrite. He was not doing what he was preaching. And that would seem to undermine not only him, but all his YouTube videos. But to this day that has not been done. The prostitution stuff came out only years after he was killed and only as a result of the FBI being forced to make it public as a result of FOIA cases and it's very heavily redacted. So go figure.

MR. RIEDEL: It's really a startling contrast between the young man who has really no institutional apparatus behind him except a bunch of Yemeni tribesmen who's brilliant at making his case. And the United States government, which employs hundreds of people countering violent extremism can't make a case for why they killed one violent extremist even to this day. It's just shocking to me. More questions? Over here, the gentleman with the beard?

QUESTIONER: Hi. Josh Goldsmith of APCO Worldwide. So bin Laden's killed the beginning of May; al-Awlaki is killed the end of September. So there's about a little under five months in

which he's alive in that time. What I'm wondering is how does he react to the death of bin Laden? And to what degree does that represent the sentiment in the Arab world in some places at that time that had showed wavering confidence in bin Laden's actions, particularly the killing of Muslims and his kind of disappearance from the scene?

MR. SHANE: To my knowledge I don't think al-Awlaki weighed in on the killing of Muslims question that had obviously arisen in Iraq with al-Awlaki and so on. And I think al-Awlaki treated bin Laden as the great sheikh who's been martyred and who is an example for us all at a less explicit level, more by deeds than by words. I think al-Awlaki saw himself as the next generation in many ways. I mean bin Laden was this guy who they used to take his VHS tapes over to Al Jazeera through couriers and he would be on there with his high-flung poetry; al-Awlaki was very down to earth, speaking very directly, not a lot of metaphor. So I think he saw himself as sort of cutting edge in that way. And he also pioneered something with the help of Samir Khan, the editor of *Inspire* that ISIS has very much picked up on. He realized that the U.S. in the post-9/11 years was really kind of hemming in al-Qaida both in the region and with the sort of restrictions on immigration and sort of a souped-up security system and surveillance system in the states. So he realized that if you had somebody who you'd convince through YouTube to join the cause, the last thing you actually want him to do is to come to Yemen -- if he's in the states, please. So that's why if you look at *Inspire*, you see the do-it-yourself -- they call it open-source jihad, a section in each of the issues of *Inspire Magazine* where they explain stuff that tragically works like how to make a pressure cooker bomb, which was used by the Tsarnaev brothers to blow up the Boston Marathon. They literally followed those instructions and were also big fans of Anwar's lectures and sermons.

But you also see crazier stuff like weld blades to the front of your pickup truck and drive into a crowd, or pour oil at a curve in the highway and cars will slide off. I mean not everything they came up with seemed terribly effective. But it is the same notion that ISIS has picked up on that if you are in the West, don't wait for instructions. Anwar al-Awlaki actually has a particular statement or lecture or whatever you want to call it where he says, "Anyone who fights the devil" -- meaning America -- "doesn't need to wait for explicit instructions. Just do it." Sort of the Nike philosophy of terrorism.

MR. RIEDEL: It is a terribly dangerous medium as you alluded to. It's also sometimes

hilarious. My favorite *Inspire* article was the one entitled "What to wear on jihad" and it says, "Do what your mother would have told you to do, wear comfortable shoes." More questions. Let's take one on this side, right here.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Mohammed Answartzer from Fulbright. I'm a fellow from Yemen. First question, the rumors about the relationship between the previous regime with al-Qaida, what's your opinion of that? And second, I find there's more focus on some al-Qaida figures or leadership and forget about the notions or the jurisprudence, the thoughts and notions, of these extremists based on -- I mean we can -- the drones can kill these figures, but even with targets, many civilians have been killed. Regardless of this point, I mean the notions, the needs, of reformation -- I mean to focus on the jurisprudence and the notions that they're based on. Thank you.

MR. SHANE: Sorry, the first one was --

MR. RIEDEL: Kind of our Yemeni partner and this relationship --

MR. SHANE: Okay, yeah. I mean everybody in Yemen believes, and there's a lot of evidence, that the previous long-time ruler of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was sort of famous for, as he once described it, once dancing on the heads of snakes, sort of playing tribes each other, playing different interest groups against each other, to maintain his own power. And he is widely believed to have sort of played those games with al-Qaida to a degree and there is some evidence of that in the sense that certain people seem to get out of jail in Yemen, either get released or find it surprisingly easy to break out, at certain points in the last years of Saleh's rule in Yemen.

I'm no expert on this. You probably know more about it. But I think there is some pretty good reason to believe that there were deals being made. And sometimes you can kind of understand, at least at the local level, deals being made. If a tribal leader goes to somebody in al-Qaida and says look, we don't like you, we don't like what you stand for, but in any case would you please just not settle in my village or something and we won't call the authorities on you. You can imagine in those very complicated situations where people are often related, blood relations, with folks in al-Qaida that complicated deals get made. But I think it is quite plausible that the Yemeni government was in cahoots at times with al-Qaida.

And your second question, if I understood it correctly, are you saying that instead of

killing al-Qaida's leaders, the U.S. should focus on helping Yemen build government institutions that function? Is that what you're saying?

QUESTIONER: (off mic)

MR. SHANE: The ideology or --

QUESTIONER: (off mic)

MR. SHANE: Yeah, one of the problems that's sort of obvious in American counterterrorism over the last 14 years is as Bruce -- I quoted Bruce in the *New York Times Magazine* -- recently was saying that we've put billions of dollars into hard power and very little into soft power. And I mean it is so easy. I think President Obama has even remarked on this, the temptation of the drone. If he wants to close Guantanamo, what happens? Congress gets up in arms. They start passing laws. They make it impossible for him to close Guantanamo. If he wants to kill Anwar al-Awlaki, he essentially gives the word. They had to find him, but the man is dead. So there's a certain functional nature to killing, a sort of simple nature to killing that the President pulls the lever and something happens. That must be satisfying to a degree in a political situation where you often pull the lever in other areas and nothing happens.

But the focus has been on hard power and you can find -- if I had 100 American counterterrorism officials who work on Yemen, they would all agree that the long-term solution in Yemen is strong solutions, is education, just a decent life for the people in Yemen. But in the next breath they'll say in the meantime we've got AQAP running around plotting to blow up more airplanes, putting bombs aboard cargo planes bound for Chicago. We can't just sit back. This is the tool that we have and so we keep using that tool. And you never seem to get to sort of phase 2 where we help Yemen become a functioning country where fewer people are sort of cannon fodder for al-Qaida.

MR. RIEDEL: The larger tragedy of it, of course, is that in 2009, 2011, 2013, Yemen was being held up by Ben Rhodes and others as the model of the Obama Doctrine where we had found a partner we could work with to fight al-Qaida. I doubt Mr. Rhodes has used Yemen as a role model in the last several months. And our former partner, Ali Abdullah Saleh, has now become identified as a pro-Iranian puppet of the government in Tehran. Ali Abdullah Saleh may be a lot of things, but he's nobody's puppet. You can rent Ali Abdullah Saleh usually by the minute, not by the hour. If the Iranians have

rented him, good luck to the Iranians. More questions? Over here, sir?

QUESTIONER: Steve Woodridge, independent researcher. Since you've looked into these things in such detail and actually myself, I've been on the front lines of some of these things overseas, do you ever get the sense that there are like layers under layers under layers and that you've gotten a couple of layers down, but maybe scratched the surface? An example with the bin Laden thing, now it turns out maybe the Pakistani intelligence people knew he was there for a couple of years and were using this fact for their advantage somehow. Or there's a terrorism expert who teaches at West Point who told me that a number of terrorism experts in the U.S. think that the U.S. knows exactly where Ayman al-Zawahiri is and could take him out any day of the week they wanted to with a drone. But for some reason we see it our advantage that he continues to be alive. So with that type of reasoning, the question would be why at this particular time they chose to drone the person that you're dealing with and then maybe the whole thing about why this time? There may be a reason that people haven't quite -- don't want people to know.

MR. SHANE: Well, I think you're -- I mean as a newspaper reporter, this is something I hear a lot; that they're not telling us the truth, things are more complicated than they look and so on and occasionally they are. But I think that in general those kinds of theories overestimate the competence of the United States government.

I think everything that I found suggests that it was on February 5, 2010, that Obama at an NSC meeting approved the killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, kill or capture technically speaking, which basically came down to killing. And I think the agencies out there -- if anything motivates the agencies, it's sort of a heads-up from the President of the United States. And everything they are doing is in a way that they want to please the White House. They want to please the President. And I think if the agencies had known where Anwar al-Awlaki was on February 5, 2010, he would have been dead by February 6, 2010.

And the fact is that they were looking for him very hard and using every trick in the book to find him, including offering his younger brother who was at the time a businessman, approaching him after midnight. These mysterious characters summoned him to the lobby of a hotel in Vienna and end up owning up to the fact that they're from the agency and say, hey, "If you help us catch him, you can get the $5 million award and you can use it to pay for his kids' education and wouldn't that be great?" So they

were really working at this and I think as soon as they figured out where he was they took a shot.

MR. RIEDEL: Right here in the front.

QUESTIONER: Eva Havas. Retired professor. I guess after reading your article in the magazine and hearing you today, one question I had was why the FBI didn't use the intelligence, the so-called intelligence, on his prostitution to get him to cooperate with them as a liaison for the Muslim community in this country?

MR. SHANE: I mean it's funny. No one -- I mean the folks I talked to at the FBI or tried to talk to fell into two categories, and this comes back to the question of the frustrations of doing reporting in this area. Some of the junior FBI folks still won't talk about this and they probably remember exactly what the debates were at the time. And some of the more senior FBI folks don't remember even though their names are on some of these documents.

It's interesting. In June 2002 there was a memo written by essentially the criminal section of the FBI to the intelligence officials at the Justice Department seeking permission to use some intelligence information to prosecute al-Awlaki under something called the Travel Act, which is a prostitution -- he was technically violating the Travel Act by going from Virginia into D.C. to visit prostitutes. In the end they didn't pursue that, and it would have been at that time I think not well-received because the guy was not at that time a terrorist. He wasn't perceived as a terrorist so they did not pursue it, but they were clearly playing around with that.

So I don't know exactly why they didn't do that. It's interesting that some, especially Muslim commentators, saw the martyrdom problem coming from a long ways away. A guy named Mohammed Ali Biari who's in Texas wrote at the time -- some of us wrote that al-Awlaki had been put on the kill list when he was still alive in 2010, but we reported that this American cleric has been put on the kill list -- he wrote a commentary that's very interesting to read in retrospect, saying "Don't kill this guy. You'll make him a martyr." And others, I don't think he did at the time, but others said when he was killed said, "A better way to handle this would have been to discredit him rather than kill him" because you're actually going to find that his stature is enhanced with his fans out there and that he's going to attract some more fans as a result of this. And that has come to pass.

MR. RIEDEL: Over there, please?

QUESTIONER: Hi. Sarah Jones with the G.W. Program on Extremism. This is a question for you, Scott, but also Bruce, I'm interested in your thoughts on this as well.

Given al-Awlaki's continued and heightened influence and resonance in the wake of his death and particularly today, how can or should the U.S. government approach dealing with his legacy and discrediting his legacy and the videos that continue to be out there and be circulated? Are the other options, such as counternarrative still viable or have CVE people and the government shown that that's not really something that they're capable of doing effectively?

MR. SHANE: Do you want me to take a shot at that? That's a fascinating question and one that I would really like to write something more about that actually because it raises pretty complicated questions, including questions of free speech and freedom of information.

I watched a lot of hours of Anwar al-Awlaki's videos in writing this book and I'd be the last guy to have -- I wouldn't have been able to write this book really without them. It's an amazing record of this guy. Fortunately I did not become a terrorist from the hundreds of hours of exposure, but at the same time you have -- Google owns YouTube. You have one of America's biggest and most successful companies that is essentially giving a platform to messages that were -- then spending millions and millions of dollars to counter and to deal with the consequences of. So it's really tough.

I've had people say it should be taken down; that it should be somehow put with a warning message like on cigarettes. I mean God knows what, but I mean usually the answer in the American system to bad speeches is more speech. So the counternarrative aspect of it is quite intriguing, and as I said, some Muslim commentators have said that's what should have been done and even that's what should be done now. This guy still should be exposed for his hypocrisy and I guess unwittingly I have started doing that.

It wasn't really my intention, but oddly enough the *New York Post* -- some in here may not be daily readers of the *New York Post*, I don't know -- but the *New York Post* last week published an excerpt from my book. It turned out they were very fascinated by the prostitutes. So it's like the two or three pages of my book that deal with the prostitutes was in the *New York Post*. And then it turns out all the other tabloids around the world ripped of the *New York Post* and ran similar stories luridly illustrated. So I guess I've done my part to begin the counternarrative effort without even trying to.

MR. RIEDEL: This is not simply an historical question. Yesterday we had the head of the Counterterrorism Bureau at the State Department here at Brookings. And she said that there are 250 Americans that the FBI have now known have gone off to fight with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, which means presumably that the kill list at some point now doesn't fit on a legal piece of paper anymore. It probably requires a couple of binders with the justification for going after these people. Tomorrow or even today we may learn that a reaper has gone after some American citizen. And one would hope -- and I think one of the messages of this book -- that should the administration decide to do that, it needs to come forward with a much better explanation the morning after as to why this person should have been on this list. As I said at the beginning, it's not just an American problem. The British government has now done it. The British government has said that it had to kill these people because they were making a plot to do something inside the United Kingdom. They've provided absolutely no information about what the plot was or who the target of the plot was. So the reaction that I found in the U.K. last weekend was people just basically don't believe it. They don't believe there was a plot; that the British government went after these guys because they were British citizens who they knew where they were.

If you're going to have an effective counternarrative, it helps to put a few facts into them. And in the case of Anwar al-Awlaki there was a book load worth of facts and we had to wait for the *New York Times* to put it out. Well, fortunately, the *New York Time* has put it out. Over here, please.

QUESTIONER: I'm Abha Shankar with the Investigative Project. You mentioned that soon after the 2002 raids Anwar al-Awlaki in a sermon came out with the term, "war on Islam."

MR. SHANE: Yes.

QUESTIONER: And now it's become very popular among the civil rights groups. How far do you think this war on Islam rhetoric actually contributes to radicalization?

MR. SHANE: That's a great question. It's interesting because -- and again you can go to YouTube and Google al-Awlaki and war on Islam and you'll find this particular sermon that he gave in Falls Church in March 2002. And if you listen to the whole thing, you realize it's not quite the message that he was putting out later, that the U.S. is at war with Islam and it's the obligation of Muslims to fight in that war against the U.S., but it's headed in that direction. But what he's really saying is Muslims have to fight -- it's like an African-American activist saying there's a war on Black people in this country. It's a

rhetorical kind of thing with a point. So that's what he meant at the time.

But I think it is the concept that the U.S. is at war with Islam seems to me to be the trump card that people like al-Awlaki played. It's the core argument that really turns people. And if you think about the history, that's the irony of the last 20 years. In 1996 and 1998 bin Laden put out these grand decrees saying we're at war with the U.S. And it's like, sure buddy. Some guy off in Afghanistan has declared war on the U.S., excuse me?

It seemed at the time to be a somewhat lunatic notion that the U.S. was at war with Islam because what bin Laden was hung up about, of course, was U.S. troops in the land of the two mosques in Saudi Arabia. That's what really ticked him off and what lit his fire. The idea that the U.S. was at war with Islam seemed just nutty. So fast forward to after 9/11, we're at war in Afghanistan. We're at war in Iraq. We invent the armed drone and we're killing people in Pakistan and Yemen and Somalia. And you go to an impressionable young person and say the U.S. is at war with Islam. The U.S. is killing Muslims around the world. Suddenly it doesn't sound quite so nutty, and I think that's the problem the U.S. is up against. The blowback from all the different efforts against terrorism has been considerable and has lent a lot of credence to the message of the jihadis of al-Qaida. I mean if you look at al-Awlaki's al-Qaida messages in the last couple of years of his life, that's what he's playing on. He's saying the U.S. is killing Muslims in all these countries. It's your obligation to fight back. And he mocked Obama saying that Bush got the U.S. stuck in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now it looks like Obama wants to get the U.S. stuck in Yemen. But I mean there's a lot of material to work with. Even if you believe, as I do, that the notion that the U.S. is at war with Islam is somewhere between ridiculous and oversimplified, you can see why that has become a more appealing argument than it was 10 years ago or 15 years ago.

MR. RIEDEL: We have time for one last question, over here. Well, let's take both of those questions.

MR. SHANE: And I'll keep the answers short.

QUESTIONER: Hi. I'm Jillian Evans. I'm in CSIS strategic studies program across the street. When we're looking at the reluctance of the U.S. government to use sort of the escort information to discredit al-Awlaki, it reminds of how we've started to declassify a lot of the documents used in the OBL compound, but one thing that we haven't declassified is information on his pornography. Do we know

anything about why the U.S. government seems so reluctant to discredit the ideology? It seems like it's not limited to just al-Awlaki.

MR. SHANE: If you find out why, let me know, will you because it is very striking. The Obama Administration has been as protective of the bin Laden documents as the al-Awlaki files and a lot of other stuff. The pictures of bin Laden that came out after his death of this kind of old man dying his beard and wrapped in this kind of shawl watching dirty movies, I mean that's a pretty powerful countermessage. And we have this so-called countering violent extremism effort program going on now, which often seems kind of lame I think to a lot of its intended targets, whereas this is real information. And one thing you can say I mean I would bet that in the audience, online audience, of some of these tabloid articles about al-Awlaki and the prostitutes that have come out in the last week or so, I'll bet there's a lot of young guys who consider themselves to be devout Muslims who are sort of tempted by the jihadi path, but are also tempted by other things and are probably reading that site quite avidly and might be influenced by it actually. So that's a great question about bin Laden as well, and I don't know what the answer is.

MR. RIEDEL: It's an administration of family values. I think that's the best answer we can have.

I want to thank Scott for coming. I want to thank you for writing a terrific book. I want to thank all of you for coming. I also want to remind you that the book is on sale as soon as you go out the door. Thank you again for coming and thank you for spending time with us today.

MR. SHANE: Thanks for having me and thanks for asking great questions.

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