

TEAR UP TEXAS, TEAR UP ANOTHER ENCRYPTION CLAIM

Both the Intercept and the Daily Beast have reported on this eye-popping exchange from the criminal complaint charging Erick Hendricks with conspiracy to provide material support for terrorism, showing an undercover FBI employee advising one of the future Garland gunmen to “tear up Texas” in the days before the attack.

[Allegedly] Elton Simpson: Did u see that link I posted? About texas? Prob not.

UCE: [states he doesn't have Simpson's Twitter handle]

Simpson: [posts link to Draw Prophet Mohammed Contest]

UCE: Tear up Texas.

Simpson: Bro, u don't have to say that... U know what happened in Paris... I think ... Yes or no ...?

UCE: Right

Simpson: So that goes without saying ... No need to be direct.

[snip]

UCE-1 subsequently traveled to Garland, Texas and was present on or about May 3, 2015, at the event.

[snip]

UCE-1 claimed to have been the “eyes” of Hendricks, to have seen Simpson and Soofi be killed, and stated that “Cops almost shot me.”

In other words, FBI had an officer onsite, scoping out the event, who was in communication

with both Elton Simpson and Hendricks, the latter of whom may have been inciting a disruption (the evidence doesn't clearly support he ordered the attack, though it is certainly possible; the complaint accuses him of conspiring with someone identified as Amir Said Abdul Rahman al-Ghazi, a cooperating witness, not the Garland shooters). Indeed, the undercover officer encouraged the attack with his "Tear up Texas."

This raises big questions about the attack itself. But it also raises questions about a claim Jim Comey made in December 2015, when arguing about the dangers of encryption.

That morning, before one of those terrorists left and tried to commit mass murder, he exchanged 109 messages with an overseas terrorist. We have no idea what he said, because those messages were encrypted.

That's interesting because the affidavit provides extensive details, based in part on Amir Said Abdul Rahman Al-Ghazi's admissions to law enforcement, and based in part on one of Simpson's phones obtained by the FBI, how Hendricks would coach people to move back and forth from Twitter to three other "secret" (presumably encrypted) messaging apps, as well as either Tor or a VPN. Certainly, the FBI has Simpson's side of "secret" conversations. There's no mention of the other Garland shooter, Nadir Soofi, but the affidavit at least appears to suggest Hendricks was playing a key broker role. So any communications with him would presumably be partly mirrored in what the Garland shooters said. Certainly, the FBI has a great deal of metadata that has been useful in filling in the network its 4 informants and 1 undercover officer haven't already filled in.

That doesn't mean the FBI was then or has since been able to crack these 109 encrypted messages.

But the claim sounds a lot less alarming when

you say, "We weren't able to decrypt 109 social media messages though we were watching other messages in real time and had an FBI officer present at the attack."