

LATIF'S UNEXPLAINED DEATH: YEMENI GOVERNMENT FACILITATES US STALL

Jason Leopold has an important story on Adnan Farhan abd al Latif's unexplained death. He provides more detail of Latif's struggles with his 1994 head injury the government claimed wasn't the reason for his 2001 trip to Pakistan. He describes how Latif's family—including his 14 year old son Ezzi Deen—responded to the news Latif had died at Gitmo.

But most importantly, Leopold adds more details to those reported by ProPublica on Latif's death and subsequent limbo.

When Latif died, people—including me—suggested he might have finally found a way to kill himself. But as Leopold points out, with every suicide at Gitmo, DOD has released details on the obvious signs of that suicide. And a Gitmo spokesperson has repeatedly confirmed there was no immediately apparent evidence of suicide.

But in a statement to the Associated Press two days after Guantanamo officials announced the death of a prisoner without naming him, Durand said, "There is no apparent cause, natural or self-inflicted."

Durand explained to Truthout at the time he made that statement he was responding to a reporter's query: "Would you call it an apparent suicide or natural causes?"

Now, however, "It would be inappropriate to speculate on the cause of death at this time."

There was nothing to "immediately suggest 'apparent suicide,'" Durand said, and the death is being

investigated by “multiple entities.”

A Yemeni official reflecting information presumably passed from John Brennan to Yemeni President Abed Rabu Mansour Hadi when they met on September 28 confirms the government appears to have ruled out suicide.

The Yemeni government official told Truthout that US officials appear to have ruled out suicide as the manner of his death.

Leopold quotes Cyril Wecht suggesting convulsions (possibly associated with his brain injury) or drugs may have had a role in Latif’s death.

Meanwhile, no one can perform independent analysis on Latif’s body, because the government has stashed it at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. The US and Yemeni governments continue the same story shared with ProPublica: the Yemenis won’t accept the body until they get a report on why he died, the US hasn’t provided that, so the body decays in US custody.

[Latif’s brother] Muhammed said the family was told by Yemen’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs that his brother’s remains would be sent home within two weeks after his death. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, according to Muhammed, obtained that information from the Yemen Embassy in Washington, DC.

But according to a Yemeni official, the Yemen government refused to accept Adnan’s body until they receive a full accounting of the cause of his death.

[snip]The Yemeni government official’s comments about Adnan were obtained during an interview late last month when President Hadi visited the United States. His statements about Adnan were made in the context of discussions Hadi

had with top US officials in the White House about the remaining Yemeni detainees in Guantanamo and Afghanistan.

Tick tock.

Tick tock.

Latif died 40 days ago. Just 19 days remain before the election. Between them, the US and Yemeni governments have forestalled the time when the US has to admit a man—the sole evidence against whom was a flawed intelligence report written while Pakistanis were trying to convince us to pay a bounty for Latif—died of unnatural causes in their custody. Possibly, they will have to admit complications of the same head injury they claimed, in court, was not all that serious, killed him.

And it appears John Brennan may be buying Hadi's complicity on this front with promises he may not be able to keep. Leopold's Yemeni source makes clear that the US and Yemeni government have tied discussions of the release of the other Yemenis in Gitmo and Bagram to the fate of Latif's body.

"President Hadi was in Washington, DC, and met with President Obama's cabinet ministers," the official said. "The remaining Yemeni detainees was one of the talking points. President Hadi has made Guantanamo and Bagram [prison in Afghanistan] a high priority for Yemen. We are emphasizing talks and opening up a dialogue to ensure the timely release and transfer and rehabilitation of those remaining detainees to Yemeni custody and we are working closely with the US government. These discussions took place with high-level officials in the Obama administration." [brackets original]

I can imagine a quid pro quo that goes this way: Hadi agrees to refuse to accept the body, helping to forestall announcements of how Latif

died, until after the election. And then the US will enter discussions to do what they should have done 2 years ago: release the Yemenis who don't pose a threat to the US.

But all that's premised on getting Congressional support to release roughly 60 Yemenis, after the Administration already neutralized the one point of leverage—detainee wins in habeas proceedings—that has worked to override Congressional intransigence in the past.

To some degree, I can't blame Hadi for doing the bidding of the superpower that put him in power, on whose continued military support he relies. I can't blame Hadi for trading Latif's decaying corpse for the fate of 60 other Yemenis unjustly held at Gitmo.

But if that's the trade-off, I do question Hadi's judgment for believing Obama will do in a second term what he had easier ways of doing—habeas proceedings—in the first.