

HOW DID MIGHTY AMERICAN BOMBING NOT DESTROY TERRORIST MEMBERSHIP LISTS?

Jenan Moussa continues her remarkable string of discoveries of intact artifacts amid the destruction of war. Six weeks after the Benghazi attack, she found a slew of papers (some unsigned) that had survived the fire that killed Chris Stevens. And in the lead-up to the ISIL escalation, she got handed a laptop of dubious provenance which contained evidence ISIL wanted to weaponize bubonic plague.

This time, she went to the “completely destroyed” headquarters of the group dubbed Khorasan by US authorities and found intact documents showing the group was in fact an elite sniper unit of Jabhat al-Nusra called the Wolf Group. Moussa reports 50 fighters (but no civilians) were killed in the strikes. She shows, among other things, an intact list of 14 fighters found at the site.

Now, it is apparently the case that’s who was targeted (or at least, who was reported by Jihadists to have been killed). This post traces their well-publicized history and location. Though as it points out, the Wolf Group does not appear, at least from what is public, to be the western focused group it has been billed as. (h/t TalkLeft, which has been great on Obama’s ISIL escalation)

So was the Wolf Group plotting against Western targets?

The honest answer, of course, is that it is impossible to know that from the open source information we have. What we do know, though, is that:

(a) there is no evidence that the group was called the Khorasan Group;

(b) the group ran a sniper training facility in Aleppo that was highly regarded and trained elite snipers to fight against Syrian government forces, so one would presume that loss of this facility will impact on JAN's ability to train snipers and thus perhaps confer a benefit on Assad;

(c) it was well-known and not a secret that Abu Yusuf al-Turki was a sniper trainer and that he fought in Afghanistan, and that other members of the training school were veteran jihadis;

(d) there are videos of the training school so its location is not a secret either.

Moussa's story completely tracks with what we know about the guy who was reported by jihadists to have been killed in the attack, Abu Yousef al-Turki, though there's not yet evidence that means Khorasan is the Wolf Group – only that the strike that killed some members of the Wolf Group have been dubbed Khorasan Group.

Which is why – even more than how the list survived – I'm most interested in how Moussa's report is now being used. Eli Lake uses it to equate threat reporting that everyone knew the President would not find sufficiently threatening to act on in June with his attack now.

The new disclosure that Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) had prepared target packages against al Qaeda's cell [comes as some critics on the left](#) and [right](#) have questioned whether the White House invented the threat from the so-called "Khorasan Group" in order to justify airstrikes that began in September against al Qaeda and ISIS

targets in Syria. Skepticism has also mounted because U.S. officials have walked back claims in the last week that the strikes on the Khorasan Group were an attempt to disrupt an imminent threat.

Jenan Moussa of Al-Aan Television this week reported that the Khorasan Group was actually an elite unit within al Qaeda's Syrian franchise, which has been focused on its fight inside the country. Other U.S. officials tell The Daily Beast that the group is composed of senior al Qaeda planners focused on attacking the West.

But much later in his report, he notes that military officials are not yet convinced al-Turki did die.

After last week's airstrike, Jihadist websites reported that two of the group's leaders, Muhsin al-Fadhli and Abu Yousef al-Turki, were killed. But thus far the U.S. military and the intelligence community have not been able to confirm this.

One problem for the U.S. intelligence community is that it has no American intelligence officers on the ground in Syria to assess the areas where U.S. missiles hit, according to two intelligence officials. Instead, these officials say, the U.S. must rely on Jordanian assets and Kurdish fighters in Syria for on the ground information.

Some U.S. intelligence officials also suspect deception. "This could be false information from these Jihadist web forums," a senior U.S. defense official said. "We don't have people on the ground, so it's hard to know."

We are relying on far more than Jordanian assets. And there is a good deal of

disinformation, and not just, it appears, from those we've labeled as jihadists.

But I'm sure it'll all work out if we continue bombing blindly.