

ISI RAIDED ABBOTTABAD COMPOUND IN 2003, LOOKING FOR ABU FURAJ AL-LIBI

The BBC has a claim from Pakistan's ISI that, if true, ought to put the torture debate to bed once and for all. ISI claims that they raided the compound in Abbottabad in 2003, while it was under construction, believing they'd capture Abu Faraj al-Libi.

The ISI official told the BBC's Owen Bennett-Jones in Islamabad that the compound in Abbottabad, just 100km (62 miles) from the capital, was raided when under construction in 2003.

It was believed an al-Qaeda operative, Abu Faraj al-Libi, was there.

The key detail is not so much the raid itself, it's that when al-Libi lived in Abbottabad, ISI believed, he was at the compound at which Osama bin Laden would eventually be found.

As I pointed out yesterday, al-Libi's Detainee Assessment Brief recounts that Osama bin Laden instructed al-Libi via a courier in 2003 that he would basically take over for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

In July 2003, detainee received a letter from UBL's designated courier, Maulawi Abd al-Khaliq Jan, requesting detainee take on the responsibility of collecting donations, organizing travel, and distributing funds to families in Pakistan. UBL stated detainee would be the official messenger between UBL and others in Pakistan.

Either right before or right after that order from OBL, al-Libi moved with his family to

Abbottabad for a year.

In mid-2003, detainee moved his family to Abbottabad, PK and worked between Abbottabad and Peshawar.

[snip]

In mid 2004, detainee moved his family from Abbottabad to Bajaur, PK.

And at some point during that year, the Pakistanis raided the compound which was already under construction.

As I suggested yesterday, all this may suggest that al-Libi oversaw the construction of the compound that would go on to shelter OBL and his family for up to six years.

And in any case, it seems to confirm that al-Libi not only knew the courier who could locate OBL, but knew of the actual location OBL would go on to occupy (while this doesn't necessarily confirm al-Libi would know OBL would occupy it, remember that OBL is reported to have moved to the compound in 2005, so in the same year al-Libi was captured).

Now, we can't say one way or another whether skilled interrogation would have yielded this information in 2005. It's possible al-Libi would have successfully shielded it in any case. But if the ISI report is even remotely accurate, it seems clear that al-Libi sat in our custody for six years, knowing of the location that might house OBL, and never disclosed it.

Update: If these CBS satellite pictures are labeled accurately, ISI couldn't have done a raid on the compound in 2003, because it was still a field. (h/t RS) Which I guess leaves the question why ISI wants to claim they were close to al-Libi in 2003?

Update: Here are a series of images from cryptome, though the 2004 one is still the same.