

THE GITMO FILES: ABU ZUBAYDAH'S FILE

✖ As bmaz posted, WikiLeaks is (finally) releasing the Gitmo Files, review files on 758 of the detainees who have passed through Gitmo. For background, here's the story Carol Rosenberg (with Tom Lasseter) wrote about the files. Among other things, they write about the "mission creep" at Gitmo, as people unrelated to al Qaeda were flown there in an attempt to extract intelligence.

There's not a whiff in the documents that any of the work is leading the U.S. closer to capturing Bin Laden. In fact, the documents suggest a sort of mission creep beyond the post-9/11 goal of hunting down the al Qaida inner circle and sleeper cells.

The file of one captive, now living in Ireland, shows he was sent to Guantanamo so that U.S. military intelligence could gather information on the secret service of Uzbekistan. A man from Bahrain is shipped to Guantanamo in June 2002, in part, for interrogation on "personalities in the Bahraini court."

That same month, U.S. troops in Bagram airlifted to Guantanamo a 30-something sharecropper whom Pakistani security forces scooped up along the Afghan border as he returned home from his uncle's funeral.

The idea was that, once at Guantanamo, 8,000 miles from his home, he might be able to tell interrogators about covert travel routes through the Afghan-Pakistan mountain region. Seven months later, the Guantanamo intelligence analysts concluded that he wasn't a risk to anyone – and had no worthwhile information. Pentagon records show they

shipped him home in March 2003, after more than two years in either American or Pakistani custody.

Apparently, Dick Cheney was so afraid of Afghan sharecroppers he had to build a camp to hold them.

As a way of assessing the files, I wanted to start with Abu Zubaydah's file, since we have a good deal of information on him via other means. And it's clear that AZ's file, at least, is full of euphemism and half truths. One thing the report is clearly not: an attempt to get at the truth of the matter.

Before I get into the deceptions written into this report, note the admission the report makes on page 13 (of 14):

Detainee is assessed to be of HIGH intelligence value. Due to detainee's HVD status, detainee has yet to be interviewed.

That is, the people writing this report apparently had never even interviewed AZ, more than two years after he passed into their custody.

The distance between those writing the summary and the information described in the report may explain the seeming contradictions in it. Consider how the report treats whether AZ was or was not a member of al Qaeda. The Executive Summary reports,

Detainee is a senior member of al-Qaida with direct ties to multiple high-ranking terrorists such as Usama Bin Laden (UBL).

Yet of course, AZ has revealed that his guards admitted this is not true. The very next line of the summary provides information that is true.

Detainee has a vast amount of

information regarding al-Qaida personnel and operations and is an admitted operational planner, financier and facilitator of international terrorists and their activities.

Though note how the file doesn't say that AZ is not an "admitted operational planner" for al Qaeda?

The body of the report later admits that AZ's application to Al Qaeda was rejected.

Detainee submitted the requisite paperwork to join al-Qaida and pledge bayat (an oath of allegiance) to UBL. Detainee's application to al-Qaida was rejected.

Note that the report doesn't explain whether AZ tried to apply to al Qaeda before or after 1992, when (as the report admits) AZ suffered a head wound that caused his cognitive impairment? Even here, though, the report seems to cover up contradictory information.

In approximately 1992 or 1993, detainee sustained a head wound from shrapnel while on the front lines.⁸ Detainee stated he had to relearn fundamentals such as walking, talking, and writing; as such, he was therefore considered worthless to al-Qaida. Detainee asked Abu Burhan al-Suri for permission to repeat the Khaldan Camp training. Detainee did not pledge bayat to UBL and did not become a full al-Qaida member. Detainee refused to make the pledge unless al-Qaida agreed to stage an attack inside Israel or mount an operation to help free Shaykh Umar Abd al-Rahman aka (the Blind Shaykh).⁹

That is, the report suggests that al Qaeda rejected AZ's application because he was "worthless" to al Qaeda. But it appears that AZ

also refused to join al Qaeda because it did not meet his his priority—attacking Israel (remember, he’s Palestinian). AZ himself has said there were other differences in approach between him and al Qaeda (notably, on the topic of attacking innocent civilians), but the report doesn’t describe them.

Also note, the report makes no other mention—none!—of AZ’s cognitive impairments that remained from that injury and which were almost certainly exacerbated by the torture he underwent in 2002. Indeed, the report says AZ is in good health, though he suffers from seizures.

And the report doesn’t even try to explain the discrepancy between its explanation that al Qaeda found him worthless and the other detainees who said he was a member of al Qaeda.

Detainee continues to deny being a member of al-Qaida. However, multiple sources and other al-Qaida members have identified detainee as an al-Qaida member.

Now, the report does explain this in detail, with references to the sources (I’ll return to this in the future, but just as an example of the problems with their evidence, they refer to Zarqawi as an al Qaeda commander, even though he didn’t become one until long after AZ was captured; also, they refer to what Ahmed Ressam said about AZ, without noting he recanted much of his testimony or describing whether Ressam had means to know the organizational structure of al Qaeda). The most important of these sources is Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (whom they refer in the body of the report as KU-10024).

Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, ISN US9KU-010024DP (KU-10024) identified detainee as a senior al-Qaida lieutenant.¹⁶ KU-10024 and detainee each played key roles in facilitating travel for al-Qaida operatives.¹⁷

Now the first of those citations is to an interrogation report. But the second one is to (!) the 9/11 Commission Report. So this Gitmo report relies on analysis conducted by a bunch of people who suspected—but didn't know—that KSM was tortured, relying in part on those tortured interrogation reports, to confirm one key tie between AZ and al Qaeda.

And note how the file plays with time. Under a bullet point asserting AZ provided refuge for Osama bin Laden after 9/11 (one that, given the absence of further details, feels like something they know to be an overstatement), it includes this sub-bullet point that doesn't apparently follow logically.

In February 2007, detainee admitted that he expressed his support of the 11 September 2001 attacks against the US during a meeting with UBL, KU-10024, and IZ-10026;

I'm not sure what statement that was, but the report makes no mention of this public statement AZ made in March 2007.

Yes, I write poetry against America and, yes, I feel good when operations by others are conducted against America but only against military targets such as the U.S.S Cole. But, I get angry if they target civilians such as those in the World Trade Center. This I am completely against [redacted].

Moreover, the reference to the actual date of a statement—2007, after AZ arrived at Gitmo (the second time), hints that statements made before that time might be less reliable.

But the file obfuscates more than just AZ's membership in al Qaeda.

For example, the report says AZ was transferred to Gitmo on September 4, 2006, "to face prosecution for terrorist activities against the

United States.” It doesn’t say, though, that AZ had already been held at Gitmo once before he arrived for the final time in 2006, from 2003-2004. And the report jumps almost immediately from the report of AZ’s condition being “stabilized” after he was captured...

Detainee was transferred to US authorities immediately after his arrest and once his condition stabilized, he was transported out of Pakistan.

... to his arrival in Gitmo (the second time) in 2006.

In short, the report on Abu Zubaydah reads partly like an attempt to glue together a lot of contradictory information—without assessing the credibility of any one piece of that information—and an either willful or unconscious effort to tell a narrative that justifies what those in charge of Gitmo were doing.

But a close reading reveals that it doesn’t succeed.