

MOUSSA KOUSSA'S SECURITY FILE

Journalists and human rights groups found a collection of damning—but not the most damning—records of Libya's cooperation with the CIA and MI6, all wrapped up in binders with labels marking CIA and UK collaboration.

Documents found at the abandoned office of Libya's former spymaster appear to provide new details of the close relations the Central Intelligence Agency shared with the Libyan intelligence service – most notably suggesting that the Americans sent terrorism suspects at least eight times for questioning in Libya despite that country's reputation for torture.

Although it has been known that Western intelligence services began cooperating with Libya after it abandoned its program to build unconventional weapons in 2004, the files left behind as Tripoli fell to rebels show that the cooperation was much more extensive than generally known with both the C.I.A. and its British equivalent, MI-6.

Some documents indicate that the British agency was even willing to trace phone numbers for the Libyans, and another appears to be a proposed speech written by the Americans for Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi about renouncing unconventional weapons.

The documents were discovered Friday by journalists and Human Rights Watch. There were at least three binders of English-language documents, one marked C.I.A. and the other two marked MI-6, among a larger stash of documents in Arabic. [my emphasis]

And yet few people seem to have thought how curious it is that such a collection came to become accessible all wrapped up with a pretty bow.

As I said, it appears these binders don't include what would be the most damning record of CIA collaboration—which would be a record of how it was that Ibn Sheik al-Libi came to be suicided in April or May 2009, just as records of the US torture program were released. Nor does it include what would be the most damning record of MI6 collaboration, negotiations trading release of the Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, in August 2009 for BP drilling rights in Libya. The records reportedly stop short in 2007 (in spite of a similar “discovery” just last week of a letter al-Megrahi wrote from Scottish prison in late 2007 or early 2008, declaring his innocence), before any of those events.

The documents cover 2002 to 2007, with many of them concentrated in late 2003 and 2004, when Moussa Koussa was head of the External Security Organization. (Mr. Koussa was most recently Libya's foreign minister.)

Note, too, the way the NYT ties these files to Moussa Koussa, the Michigan State-educated former Libyan spook in chief. Perhaps the timing and the English language of these makes that tie clear, but it seems ... convenient, in ways I'll return to.

And note one more detail. The most bewildering detail from these letters is their description of how the CIA conspired with Libya to torture an anti-Qaddafi figure who has since gone on to take a leading role in the US-backed rebellion.

When Libyans asked to be sent Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq, another member of the [Libyan Islamic Fighting Group], a case officer wrote back on March 4, 2004, that “we are committed to developing this relationship for the benefit of both our services,” and promised to do their best to locate him, according to a document in the C.I.A. binder.

Two days later, an officer faxed the Libyans to say that Mr. Sadiq and his pregnant wife

were planning to fly into Malaysia, and the authorities there agreed to put them on a British Airways flight to London that would stop in Bangkok. "We are planning to take control of the pair in Bangkok and place them on our aircraft for a flight to your country," the case officer wrote.

Mr. Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch said he had learned from the documents that Sadiq was a nom de guerre for Abdel Hakim Belhaj, who is now a military leader for the rebels.

In an interview on Wednesday [here's that interview], Mr. Belhaj gave a detailed description of his incarceration that matched many of those in the documents. He also said that when he was held in Bangkok he was tortured by two people from the C.I.A.

Aside from how awkward this might make cooperation going forward (oh, hey, not only are you the guy we tortured in Bangkok, but everyone here knows about it!), but it may also make it politically difficult for the US government to back the rebels.

In short, it's all rather curious that this collection of documents fell into the hands of journalist and human rights workers.

And then let's reflect on how these documents got left—the implication is, by Koussa—in Libya to be found, but not the most damning possible documents. Where did those go? Remember that Koussa (who moved from his spook in chief position to serve as foreign minister in 2009, before both al-Libi's suicide and al-Megrahi's return) remained in Libya until March. By that point, rebels were already targeting him for retribution after the won. And US intelligence experts were discussing how damning the intelligence files implicating Koussa would be once they were liberated.

The Libyan official who was a key CIA contact in the war on terrorism and the removal of Moammar Gaddafi's weapons of mass

destruction may have no option now but to go down with the ship.

Foreign Minister Musa Kusa, who plotted assassinations and airline bombings as well as helped Washington pursue al-Qaeda terrorists, cannot defect to the opposition like other top Libyan officials, says a spokesman for a U.S.-based Libyan human rights group, because "he has too much blood on his hands."

[snip]

"There's a lot of stuff in Libyan intelligence files that will make him make him look bad" to the opposition, added Vince Cannistraro, a former top CIA official who led the agency's probe of the 1988 bombing of PanAm 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland.

"It's over for them," Cannistraro said of Gaddafi and Kusa. "The opposition is closing in from all six entrances to Tripoli now." Gaddafi, he said, is countering with African mercenaries "being flown directly into the airfield that used to be the American Wheelus Air Base."

It's the kind of operation Kusa would be good at.

"What will become of [Kusa] I don't know," said Khattaly, whose father was press secretary at Libya's Washington embassy from 1971 to 1973 before resigning over Gaddafi's policies, "but jumping ship is not safe for him. He did quite a bit damage over maybe 20 years as head of the intelligence service."
[my emphasis]

Note the files Cannistraro is most interested in—those on the Lockerbie bombing, as well as earlier assassinations—pre-date the time frame of these documents. Also, then, presumably not among the documents found the other day.

And then a month after this speculation, Koussa got himself to the UK, where he defected (though

he remains under some kind of detention).

If you had plans to land in London as an attempt to save your life, what do you think you'd do with the files implicating British intelligence? Do you think you'd leave them in Libya for the rebels to discover?

I'm not suggesting these documents are inauthentic—or unimportant for the way they show the US sending men to be tortured at Libya's hand. But it all does seem to be a carefully orchestrated release.