

IT WAS JSOC, WITH THE ERRANT DRONE TARGETING, IN THE YEMENI COUNTRYSIDE

Michael Isikoff reported yesterday that the Administration is conducting an investigation into the drone strike that reportedly killed a wedding party back in December. While the investigation is, by itself, intriguing, I'm just as interested in Isikoff's report that JSOC, not the CIA, conducted the strike.

U.S. and Yemeni officials say the drone strike was carried out by the Defense Department's Joint Special Operations Command, not the CIA, which operates its own drones in Yemen.

He also quotes a human rights activist, Baraa Shibani, suggesting someone fed the US bad intelligence.

Baraa Shibani, a human rights activist who interviewed local villagers two days after the strike, said he saw no sign that Badani was anywhere near the village, noting that he was from another region of Yemen, and, as a "stranger" to the area, was unlikely to have been invited to a gathering celebrating the wedding between a groom and bride in two neighboring villages.

"There was clearly a wedding party," said Shibani. He said he believes U.S. officials "may have been fed the wrong intel. They saw a group of people waiting in trucks for a convoy and they assumed they were militants, so they made the decision to strike."

Between 2009 and 2011, that happened a lot to

JSOC, which is one reason the CIA got to operate in Yemen (or, viewed another way, it is one reason the Saudis got to take a larger role in our drone targeting in Yemen). The timing of the errant JSOC strike is all the more interesting, coming as it did just weeks after confirmation that Brennan was not giving up his drones.

But I'm just as interested in another bit of timing. As Isikoff reminds, the errant drone strike took place one week after the December 5 AQAP attack on Yemen's Ministry of Defense, which also killed innocent people in an attached hospital (which they subsequently apologized for), but which was targeted at what AQAP claimed was the Yemeni operations center for drone targeting. No one has ever confirmed whether they did breach that operations center. And Yemeni officials remain really squirrely about who died in the MoD attack and whether there were any non-Yemenis among the non-hospital victims.

At one level, AQAP-partisans within the Yemeni government might have fed JSOC bad intelligence to create a disaster bigger than the hospital attack. But I also wonder – whether or not there were Saudis or Americans in that attack – if the targeting process got disrupted by the MoD attack, resulting in the attack on the wedding.