



Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi October 2009



[Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi, the former emir of the Khaldan training camp, was a highly experienced Jihadi who operated in Afghanistan from the late 1980s until his arrest in November 2001. Evidence gathered during his interrogations played a major role in justifying the U.S. case for invading Iraq. Al-Libi, a hardened Jihadi with experience in counter-intelligence, subsequently retracted his assertions regarding Iraq. In May 2009, it was reported that he committed suicide in a Libyan prison.]

Name: Ali Mohamed Abdul Aziz al-Zar'ani al-Fakhiri
DOB: 1963
POB: Ajdabiya, Libya
AKA: Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi; Salah al-Libi
Married to: Aliya al-Adnan (Syrian national)



The proclaimed suicide of High Value Detainee Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi in a Libyan prison on May 10, 2009, was unexpected at the very least. According to a statement by The Information Committee Qa'ida al-Jihad Organization, "The cruel and arrogant criminals claimed that Ibn al-Sheikh had committed suicide, but no, Ibn al-Sheikh is not one of the people who commit suicide. They killed him, or tortured him, made him sick and neglected him."

Al-Libi's sudden death coincided with the first visit by Egypt's spymaster Omar Suleiman to Tripoli. Suleiman arrived and met with Moatessem-Billal Kadhafi, the fourth son of Libyan leader Moammar Kadhafi who also serves as his national security adviser.¹

A few years ago, Moatessem had to flee Libya for his involvement in the planning of a military coup against his father and he stayed in Egypt during this time. Recently, he reconciled with his father and returned to the country where he was given an influential

¹ Confidential interview, May 2009.

position, much to the dismay of Khadafi's second son, Saif al-Islam, who felt threatened as he is to become the heir to his father's throne.²

It was Saif al-Islam's newspaper, *Oea*, that broke the story of Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi's death. The reason for his death had to do with Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi being the highest ranking Jihadi in custody in early 2002.³

Al-Libi was arrested on November 11, 2001 when he tried to cross the Afghan-Pakistan border. In early 2002, he was flown to Egypt for enhanced questioning by the Egyptian Intelligence Service.

The information from interrogations was reported in a DIA intelligence summary (DITSUM #44-02):

"This is the first report from Ibn al-Shaykh in which he claims Iraq assisted al-Qaida's CBRN efforts. However, he lacks specific details on the Iraqi's involved, the CBRN materials associated with the assistance, and the location where training occurred. It is possible he does not know any further details; it is more likely this individual is intentionally misleading the debriefers. Ibn al-Shaykh has been undergoing debriefs for several weeks and may be describing scenarios to the debriefers that he knows will retain their interest. Saddam's regime is intensely secular and is wary of Islamic revolutionary movements. Moreover, Baghdad is unlikely to provide assistance to a group it cannot control."⁴

The DIA was cautious for good reason. According to Omar Nasiri, who went to Afghanistan as a spy for the French Foreign Intelligence Service (DGSE) between 1995 and 1996, the Mujahideen were trained in counter-interrogation. Nasiri himself was trained in the Khaldan camp and in Darunta. The Emir of the Khaldan camp was Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi. In his book *Inside the Jihad*, he wrote:

"...interrogation was a great opportunity for a brother. He could learn more about the enemy and spread misinformation that would help his group obtain its objective. This kind of manipulation required skill and a brother must train for it, just as he would train to use a gun. He must learn to draw out his interrogators. The longer the interrogation went on, the more information the interrogators would reveal about their knowledge and their strategy. The brother could use that information to shape his own responses, to tell the enemy lies that sound true."⁵

And Nasiri wrote:

² Confidential interview, May 2009.

³ Ennahar, A former Libyan detainee at Guantanamo commits suicide in prison in Libya, May 10, 2009; <http://www.ennaharonline.com/en/international/1151.html>; Human Rights Watch, Death of Former CIA Prisoner, May 11, 2009; <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/11/libyaus-investigate-death-former-cia-prisoner>.

⁴ <http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/11/DIAletter.102605.pdf>; Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on Post War findings about Iraq's WMD programs and links to terrorism and how they compare with prewar assessments, September, 8, 2006, <http://intelligence.senate.gov/phaseiiaccuracy.pdf>.

⁵ Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York 2006), p.229.

“Ibn Sheikh did not crack under the pressure of torture. He handled his interrogators with the same skill that he used to handle his gun. He knew what his interrogators wanted, and he was happy to give it to them. He wanted to see Saddam toppled even more than the Americans did. As he had told us at Khaldan, Iraq was the next great *jihad*.”⁶

Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi was born Ali Mohamed Abdul Aziz al-Zar’ani al-Fakhiri in 1963 in Ajdabiya, Libya.⁷ He left for Afghanistan in the 1980s and stayed in the Afghan-Pakistan border area after the Soviet troops left in 1989.⁸ After the Soviets retreated, Al-Libi began organizing training camps for new recruits, and he became the emir of the Khaldan training camp in Afghanistan. The Khaldan camp was established in 1989 by Abdallah Azzam’s Maktab al-Khidamat (MaK), according to Abu Musab al-Suri in his *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*: “and over the years...the number of trainees exceeded perhaps 20,000.”⁹ His deputy in the Khaldan camp was Abu Bakr, a Jordanian of Palestinian origin, who was arrested in Jordan after 9/11.¹⁰

Ibn al-Sheik al-Libi was described as being tough, intellectual, and charismatic.¹¹ He wanted to prepare the trainees for the Global Jihad. According to al-Libi, Jerusalem was the heart of Islam (al-Jihad ‘ila al-Quds al-Sharif) and reclaiming Palestinian land from Israel was by far the most important battle.¹² The jihad against the Hindus in Kashmir was also vital as, according to al-Libi, they were idolaters. But the biggest threat, as far as he was concerned, were the Shiites because they were innovators. There is only the Quran and the Sunna, and al-Libi felt there could be no innovation in Islam.¹³

In the Khaldan camp, the focus was on the general preparation for the Jihad. He worked closely with Bin Laden and was important to al-Qaida, as more than 20,000 recruits came through his camp. In his oral statement to the Military Tribunal at Guantanamo, Abu Zubaydah (real name Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn) said that the doctrine taught at the Khaldan camp “was not to train against those who did not invade Muslim lands. Our doctrine was not the same as what Usama bin Laden and al-Qaida were promoting, which was and is a doctrine of offensive jihad.” Abu Zubaydah added that he “disagreed with the al Qaida philosophy of targeting innocent civilians like those in the World Trade Center.”¹⁴

According to Abu Zubaydah, Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi was not only the emir of the Khaldan training camp, but also of the Darunta training complex. Although al-Libi and Bin Laden cooperated in the mid and second half of the 1990s, frictions emerged. Abu Zubaydah said “Bin Laden wanted al Qaida to have control of Khaldan, but we refused

⁶ Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York 2006), pp. 180, 230

⁷ http://www.interpol.int/public/Data/NoticesUN/Notices/Data/2003/12/2003_9212.asp.

⁸ Omar Nashiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York, 2006), pp. 168-169.

⁹ Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri* (New York 2008) p. 249; Jarret Brachman, Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi Dies in Libyan Prison, May 12, 2009; <http://jarretbrachman.net/?p=559>.

¹⁰ Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York 2006), pp. 156-160, 294.

¹¹ Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York 2006), pp. 169, 179.

¹² Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York 2006), pp. 179, 233.

¹³ Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad* (New York 2006), p. 179.

¹⁴ Verbatism Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing of ISN10016, page 9; http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10016.pdf

since we had different ideas...After 2000 I visited Usama bin Laden to ask for help to re-open Khaldan.”¹⁵

In 2001, Usama bin Ladin wanted Abu al-Khayr to take responsibility over three cities in Afghanistan. Abu al-Khayr gave the responsibility of Khowst to Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi. Ibn al-Sheikh wanted his coordinator (head of logistics) Abu Zubaydah to become his deputy, but the latter declined because he had limited experience and no memory.¹⁶ Ibn al-Sheikh became a member of al-Qaida after 9/11, when Usama bin Ladin personally asked him to join.¹⁷

When Jalalabad fell, Ibn al-Sheikh retreated to Tora Bora and took over the defense of the mountainous areas and the caves. The al-Qaida fighters retreated from Tora Bora in three groups. Usama bin Ladin asked Ibn al-Sheikh to lead his group, but al-Libi declined and took control of a group of younger, less experienced fighters. Two guides assigned to the group of Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi led them as they crossed the border into Pakistan. Instead of leading the group into safety, the guides led them into the area of Shiite tribes who encircled the group and handed them over to the Pakistani authorities.¹⁸

Al-Libi was arrested on November 11, 2001 when he tried to cross the Afghan-Pakistan border. Since his arrest, he traveled around as a “ghost prisoner” - according to Abu Yahya al-Libi who first met Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi in a ghost prison in the Pansjir Valley (Afghanistan) in June 2003. Abu Yahya asked Ibn al-Sheikh if he was a member of al-Qaida. Ibn al-Sheikh answered, “Yes, I am a member of al-Qaida.”

According to Abu Yahya, Ibn al-Sheikh was first imprisoned in a jail in Kohat (Pakistan). From Pakistan, he was brought to Kandahar and later transferred to Kabul. Then he was brought to Egypt to return in June 2003 to Afghanistan. He spent approximately five months in the ghost prison in the Pansjir Valley and returned to Kabul in October 2003.¹⁹ Other sources state that he was interrogated by officials in Afghanistan, Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan. He was never sent to Guantanamo, but instead, was returned to Libya, in early 2006, where he was sentenced to life and incarcerated in the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli.²⁰

In early 2002, while being interrogated in Egypt, al-Libi provided two important accounts to his interrogators. After being put in a small box for approximately 17 hours,

¹⁵ Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing of ISN10016, p. 10; http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10016.pdf

¹⁶ Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing of ISN10016, p. 10; http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10016.pdf

¹⁷ Al-Falluja Diaries, Sector of Historic Studies and Strategic Recommendations, “Jihad Basil” Martyr Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi, may Allah have mercy on him (Written by one of his companions).

¹⁸ Al-Falluja Diaries, Sector of Historic Studies and Strategic Recommendations, “Jihad Basil” Martyr Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi, may Allah have mercy on him (Written by one of his companions).

¹⁹ Abu Yahya al-Libi, speech “Ibn al-Sheikh...The Grave and not the Poplar”, As-Sahab, June-July 2009.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, Death of Former CIA Prisoner, May 11, 2009;

Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on Post War findings about Iraq’s WMD programs and links to terrorism and how they compare with prewar assessments, September, 8, 2006, p. 81 (84); <http://intelligence.senate.gov/phaseiiaccuracy.pdf>
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/11/libyaus-investigate-death-former-cia-prisoner>

al-Libi was given a last opportunity to tell the truth by his interrogator. The Egyptian interrogator was not satisfied with the answers and he hit al-Libi with an arm thrust across his chest. Al-Libi fell on his back and was then punched for 15 minutes. Al-Libi told his interrogators after the punching that Iraq had trained al-Qaida operatives in chemical and biological weapons.²¹ This information was later used in Colin Powell's speech to the UN Security Council to justify the invasion of Iraq.²²

While in Egypt, al-Libi also disclosed that al Qaida had collaborated with Russian organized crime syndicates to have "canisters containing nuclear material" smuggled into New York.²³

Later al-Libi recanted both stories.²⁴ The Egyptians were embarrassed by this admission, and the Bush government found themselves in hot water internationally. Then, in May 2009, Omar Suleiman saw an opportunity to get even with al-Libi and traveled to Tripoli. By the time Omar Suleiman's plane left Tripoli, Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi had committed 'suicide'.

Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi was particularly important to the global jihad movement while he was the emir of the Khaldan and Derunta training camps. Also significant was the fact that while detained, he was able to continue fighting. With his statements on WMD links between Iraq and al-Qaida, he caused both internal and diplomatic problems for the U.S. government and brought shame to the Egyptian government; thus, two key enemies of the global jihad movement ostensibly took a hit, credibility wise; ultimately, however, his deception was responsible for his downfall.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, Death of Former CIA Prisoner, May 11, 2009;

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/05/11/libyaus-investigate-death-former-cia-prisoner>.

²² Transcript of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the U.N. Security Council on the U.S. case against Iraq, February 5, 2003.

<http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/02/05/sprj.irq.powell.transcript/>.

²³ Michael Isikoff, The Missing Terrorist, *Newsweek*, May 28, 2007;

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/183629>; George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm* (New York 2007) pp. 353-4.

²⁴ George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm* (New York 2007) p. 269.