Killing of Abu-Laith Al-Libbi

Incident

Al-Qaeda’s purported No. 3, Abu Laith al-Libbi died in a missile attack at approximately 1:15 am early Tuesday 29 January 2008. According to details, al-Libbi, along with 12 militants, including Arabs, Uzbeks and local Taliban, was staying at the guesthouse of a local Torikhel Wazir, Abdul Sattar, in village Khushali situated at a distance of 3 km from Tehsil Mir Ali in North Waziristan Agency (NWA) of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). There were also reports that another senior Al Qaeda leader, Abu Obaidah al-Masri was also present with al-Libbi at the time of the attack, which could, however, not be confirmed.

Details

The killing of Abu Laith al-Libbi was announced by a website Ekhlaas.com, which is usually used by Islamists to post their messages. The website stated: “We congratulate the Islamic nation for the martyrdom of the Sheikh, the lion, Abu Laith Al-Libbi. May God accept him (as a martyr).” The statement further said that al-Libbi was “martyred with a group of his brothers in the land of Muslim Pakistan”.

However, there has been no official confirmation of al-Libbi’s death, as well as the cause that led to his death, and both the US and Pakistani Administrations are tight lipped about the incident. A US military official with the Combined Joint Task Force-82, the anti-terror unit responsible for searching for Libi in Afghanistan, told CNN he had no information on Al-Libi’s death, but added that CJTF-82 did not collect information from outside of Afghanistan, and would be informed of targeted operations only “if the Pakistani military share that with us”. Similarly, senior Pakistani official refuse to confirm Al-Libi’s death saying they were “still trying to gather details on the missile strike”. However, AFP quoted an unidentified official in Washington as saying that there were “very strong indications” that Libi had been killed. But he provided no further details.

There are two versions of al-Libbi’s killing: According to one, he perished in a US-controlled predator drone strike; while other reports claim that al-Libbi was killed in a missile attack by the Pakistani security forces. However, the first version seems to be true, since the US has previously employed predator drones to target top Al Qaeda.

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4 Ibid.
5 ‘Senior Al Qaeda Operative Libi Killed’, Daily Times, 1 February 2008
6 ‘Senior Al Qaeda Operative Libi Killed’, Daily Times, 1 February 2008
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 ‘12 Killed in North Waziristan Air Strike’, The Post, 30 January 2008
leaders in FATA, such as Hamza Rabia in December 2005 in Aosuri village in Mir Ali tehsil, as well as failed attempts to target Al Qaeda No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahari and others leaders in Damadola and Chinagai in January and October 2006 respectively. According to local residents of the area, “we recognise the sound and shape of the American drone and two such planes have been hovering in the sky since 28 January, and people have seen them over Mir Ali and Miranshah.” Tribesmen further reported “two such planes made flights at a very low altitude on Monday (28 February 2008).”

Soon after the missile attack, local Taliban militants surrounded the site, and barred the locals from coming nearby. The local Taliban militants quickly removed the bodies so as to leave no trace of the presence of foreign militants.

The Killing of Abu-Laith al-Libbi will have a tremendous impact on Al-Qaeda. Al-Libbi was considered to be the 3rd senior leader of Al Qaeda after Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. He was the initiator of alliance between Al-Qaeda and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in September 2006. He also initiated the merger of Jamaat al-Muqatila al-Islamiya or Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) in November 2007.

Pictures

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