

Leaked Pakistan report details bin Laden's secret life

Doug Stanglin, USATODAY 4:31 p.m. EDT July 8, 2013

Al Jazeera says the report calls the handling of bin Laden affair a 'national disgrace.'



(Photo: AP)

Osama bin Laden lived undetected in Pakistan for nine years before he was killed by U.S. forces, according to a leaked Pakistani government report that blasts the country's civilian and military leadership for "gross incompetence" over the bin Laden affair.

It finds that Pakistan's intelligence establishment had "closed the book" on bin Laden by 2005, and was no longer actively pursuing intelligence that could lead to his capture.

The 336-page Abbottabad Commission report, obtained by Al Jazeera (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/07/20137813412615531.html>), blasts the government and military for a "national disaster" over its handling of bin Laden and calls on the leadership to apologize to the people of Pakistan for their "dereliction of duty."

The report, never released publicly, was ordered after the May 1, 2011, raid by U.S. special forces on bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad. The al-Qaeda leader was killed and his body removed during the raid.

READ: The full report (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/07/20137813412615531.html>)

According to Al Jazeera, the report finds the government's intention in conducting the inquiry was likely aimed at "regime continuance, when the regime is desperate to distance itself from any responsibility for the national disaster that occurred on its watch." It says that the inquiry was likely "a reluctant response to an overwhelming public and parliamentary demand."

The report blames "Government Implosion Syndrome" for lack of intelligence on bin Laden's nine-year residence in Pakistan and its response to the U.S. raid.

The commission says Bin Laden and his family were apparently able to stay and travel in Pakistan without detection because he had a small, but dedicated, network "that met their every need."

"They kept a very low profile and lived extremely frugally," the report says. "They never exposed themselves to public view. They had the cover of the two Pakistani Pashtun couriers cum security guards. They had minimum security. OBL successfully minimized any 'signature' of his presence. His minimal support blended easily with the surrounding community."

Al Jazeera quotes the report as saying the commission finds that "culpable negligence and incompetence at almost all levels of government can more or less be conclusively established."

The report focuses intently on the night of the raid, interviewing bin Laden's family and members of the household extensively.

The report said accounts differ as to whether the al-Qaeda leader was killed by the first shot fired at him when he went to the bedroom door as soldiers came up the stairs or later when they stormed the room.



Pakistani police stand guard beside a sealed main gate leading to the hide-out house of slain al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad on May 4, 2011. (Photo: Aamir Qureshi, AFP/Getty Images)

"He did not use his wife or daughter as a shield to protect himself," the report says. "He was not armed when he was shot."

One of his daughters, identified as Surnayya, told the commission that she saw one of the U.S. helicopters land from her window and immediately rushed upstairs to bin Laden's room.

"Although she did not see her father fall, she saw him on the floor," the report says. "He had been hit in the forehead and she knew he was dead. His face was 'clear' and recognizable. According to her, blood flowed 'backwards over his head.' However, because of the dark she could not see very clearly. The American soldiers asked her to identify the body. She said, 'my father.'"

In summing up its assessment of the killing of bin Laden, the commission spares few words:

The whole episode of the U.S. assassination mission of May 2, 2011 and the Pakistan government's response before, during and after appears in large part to be a story of complacency, ignorance, negligence, incompetence, irresponsibility and possibly worse at various levels inside and outside the government.

Among other findings:

- Bin Laden entered Pakistan in mid-2002 after narrowly escaping capture in the battle of Tora Bora in Afghanistan. Over nine years, he moved to various places inside the country, including South Waziristan and northern Swat Valley.
- In Swat, the al-Qaeda leader reportedly met with Khalid Shaikh Mohammad, the alleged mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, in early 2003. About a month later, KSM was captured in Rawalpindi in a joint U.S.-Pakistani operation, and bin Laden fled the area.
- Bin Laden, along with two of his wives and several children and grandchildren, moved into the custom-built compound in Abbottabad, a military garrison town, in 2005 and lived there until the U.S. raid.
- Bin Laden was very concerned about surveillance. The report says bin Laden wore a cowboy hat outside to avoid detection from above and considered buying and cutting down a row of poplar trees on the perimeter of the Abbottabad compound because he thought it might provide cover for observers.
- The presence of a CIA support network to help track down bin Laden without the Pakistani establishment's knowledge was "a case of nothing less than a collective and sustained dereliction of duty by the political, military and intelligence leadership of the country."

In Washington, the admiral who oversees special operations ordered the files about the Abbottabad raid wiped from the Pentagon's computers and moved to the CIA, apparently to protect their secrecy, according to a recent draft report by the Defense Department's inspector general.

The Associated Press, which had sought the records from the Pentagon more than two years ago, writes (http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_BIN_LADEN_FILES_PURGED?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT) that the secret move "set off no alarms within the Obama administration" and that the action by by Adm. William McRaven (<http://www.navy.mil/navydata/bios/navybio.asp?>

bioID=401) appears contrary to federal rules and perhaps the Freedom of Information Act.

CIA spokesman Preston Golson said in a statement that it was "absolutely false" that records were moved to avoid the legal requirements of the Freedom of Information Act.

The CIA said the SEALs were essentially reassigned from the Navy to work temporarily for the agency, which has presidential authority to conduct covert operations.

McRaven, the commander of United States Special Operations Command, sought to protect the names of the personnel involved, said the inspector general's draft report, which was released weeks ago. A spokesman for the admiral declined comment.

AP writes that the records transfer "could represent a new strategy for the U.S. government to shield even its most sensitive activities from public scrutiny."

Contributing: The Associated Press