

ANNOUNCING NATIONAL USE ZAZI TO GAIN NEW SURVEILLANCE POWERS DAY!

The last line of this article on how the Najibullah Zazi arrest was a victory for the Obama Administration's approach to terrorism boasts that the Administration didn't have a John Ashcroft-style press conference on the day of the arrest.

With Zazi's arrest, administration officials said they had a renewed sense of confidence that they could approach security threats in a new way. "The system probably worked the way it did before, but we made a conscious decision not to have a big press conference" about Zazi's arrest, a senior official said.

Which is pretty hysterical, coming as it does in one article of several that are obviously similarly seeded, boasting of Obama's new approach to terrorism. There are several aspects to this apparent PR blitz. Articles providing details (though none as detailed as the NPR story over the weekend) explaining how the CIA learned of Zazi and shared info with the FBI. Articles discussing the address by Eric Holder, Janet Napolitano, and Robert Mueller yesterday, lauding information sharing. All of which will lead into coverage of Obama's address to the National Counter-Terrorism Center, scheduled for today at 11:40.

We didn't have a press conference when we arrested Zazi, the WaPo's source (who could be Rahm or John Brennan) seems to be saying, but we're sure as hell going to have a media blitz about it when it serves our purposes.

What's especially nice about this WaPo piece,

though, is it makes the goal of the media blitz explicit, tying it to the discussion of the PATRIOT Act.

At the same time, the Obama administration is pressing Congress to move swiftly to reauthorize three provisions of the USA Patriot Act set to expire in late December. They include the use of "roving wiretaps" to track movement, e-mail and phone communications, a tool that federal officials used in the weeks leading up to Zazi's arrest.

With the apprehension of Zazi, as well as several other covert operations at home and abroad, the Obama administration is increasingly confident that it has struck a balance between protecting civil liberties, honoring international law and safeguarding the country.

Note, however, that the WaPo focuses on one of the least controversial of the practices, roving wiretaps. It does not discuss how the Administration wants to lower the legal standard for allowing FBI agents to get business records and things like medical records on people who may have no tie to terrorism. It does not talk about National Security Letters, which let the FBI get certain records with no court review. And it does not discuss how the Administration is using more and more data mining of US persons.

In other words, it boasts of Obama's approach to terrorism without actually revealing what it is, without even providing the level of detail Dina Temple-Raston provided over the weekend.

So the PR blitz serves the same purpose as John Ashcroft's circus-like pressers did: to wow citizens that our national security team has prevented an act of terrorism. But to offer that—rather than an honest discussion of what

that means for civil liberties—as the sole discourse on terrorism.

Don't get me wrong: the men and women who tracked down Zazi deserve some public kudos. But that shouldn't be tied to a political campaign designed to further curtail civil liberties.