LINKS, 7/19/11

Our American Empire

Yesterday, I noted that Bob Baer predicts an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities this fall. Today, Reuters reports that Iran is adding more sophisticated centrifuges to its nuclear development program, presumably to repair some of the damage done by Stuxnet.

The rebels we're about to give all of Qaddafi's looted money to? They're using kids—as young as 7—to fight their war against Qaddafi.

In Pakistan, we're killing kids directly; the Bureau of Investigative Journalism counts 6 kids among the 45 civilians we've killed in drone strikes in the last year.

A group of Pakistani drone victims and their families are seeking to arrest former CIA general counsel John Rizzo for "conspiracy to wage war and commit murder and other crimes in violation of Pakistani law, and to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity in breach of international law." Rizzo basically boasted to Newsweek for a February article, saying ""How many law professors have signed off on a death warrant?"

J.M Berger notes that some "homegrown" Islamic terrorists are increasingly ignoring al Qaeda doctrine. Not only does that lead them to strike at different targets than al Qaeda might choose, but it makes it a lot easier to catch them. (Some might say that that's a testament to the way our counterterrorism strategy needs to create terrorists here to sustain the industry.)

If you haven't already, read this Glenn Greenwald smackdown of the way the press has unquestionably repeated the government's equation of al-Shabaab with al Qaeda. It's not enough, I guess, for the press to get us into war; it also helps the government slowly redefine who we're at war with so we can never declare victory and go home.

The National Surveillance State

Wall Street must have liked the Murdochs' performance today in Parliament; News Corp stock is up over 6% on the day. Meanwhile, WYNC shows how it easy it is to carry out the hack News Corp used on its victims.

Iran has banned Google+ as a plot of US spy agencies, which at one level speaks badly of free speech. But I have to admit that I believe that Google+ will make it easier to conduct surveillance—probably on Iranians and Americans—as it offers a virtual one-stop shop spooks can use to map out social networks. And while he doesn't address my paranoia, Julian Sanchez has a good reflection on Google+ and privacy.

No Rule of Law

The government continues its efforts to prosecute those who, well, didn't crash the economy through financial fraud. Today, they're going after ~~Reddit co-founder~~ online activist Aaron Swartz for "stealing" a bunch of academic journals. I can see how the liberation of knowledge is more dangerous to our government than the theft of average folks' homes. (Corrected per Andrew)

And that theft is ongoing. Both the AP and Reuters had reports yesterday on ongoing robo signing.

The Great Recession

Borders is liquidating, and with it, it is liquidating over 10,000 jobs. Yet another MI company going under.

Food stamp use in the US continues to rise. In three states—OR, MS, and and NM, over 20% residents rely on foodstamps (MI is close, with 19.4% of residents using food stamps).

Obama is thinking creatively about ways to fund education now that we have to spend our education money bombing kids on the other side of the world: get private corporations to donate

to schools. Apparently, Microsoft has ponied up $15 million in video games for classroom. I guess asking Microsoft to end the practice of sheltering its profits from taxes—and giving that money to schools instead—would make too much sense?

The Politics of Influence

DOJ has indicted two men for serving as unregistered agents for Pakistan. Basically, the ISI is laundering money through a Kashmir Center to lobby for Kashmir unification. I've got two questions about this. First, how does prosecution of what is basically an ISI effort tie to our troubled relationship with Pakistan? Also, if it's okay for corporations to donate money, why didn't the Kashmir Center just go into some business and launder the money that way?

Thankfully, the IRS is finally doing something about one way private entities dump money into elections: it denied non-profit status to three groups the sole purpose of which "is to provide education solely to individuals affiliated with a certain political party who want to enter politics."