JUDY MILLER, BARABARA STARR, AND AN INFLUX OF INTELLIGENCE

I'm going to disappoint Jim by not dedicating a full post to Judy Miller's graceless rant about the AP's Pulitzer win, in which she whines that the AP hasn't taken Ray Kelly's insistence that his NYPD's spying is legal seriously enough. I already had to fisk Miller's credulous regurgitation of Ray Kelly's defense of the NYPD here and then remind her that journalists should be in the business of sorting out false claims from true ones here. Given her past failures to write credibly on the AP's NYPD series, I trust no one will make the mistake of doing anything but dismissing everything she has to say about the AP series.

But since I've already started a post about mouthpieces for those in power, maybe I should take a look at what Miller's close kin, Barbara Starr, had to say about expanded drone strikes in Yemen.

The lead in Greg Miller's story on this emphasized how little intelligence we would have on the expanded drone strikes.

> The CIA is seeking authority to expand its covert drone campaign in Yemen by launching strikes against terrorism suspects even when it does not know the identities of those who could be killed, U.S. officials said.
>
> Securing permission to use these "signature strikes" would allow the agency to hit targets based solely on intelligence indicating patterns of suspicious behavior, such as imagery showing militants gathering at known al-Qaeda compounds or unloading explosives.

Compare that with the headline and lead in

Barbara Starr's version.

> Intel influx leads to increased U.S.
> strikes in Yemen
>
> The increased pace of counterterrorism
> strikes in Yemen by U.S. drones and
> aircraft is a result of what U.S.
> military and intelligence officials
> describe as improved intelligence about
> the leadership of the al Qaeda movement
> in that country.

Now, Starr doesn't mention the term "signature
strikes" at all in this piece. and technically,
she seems to be addressing only the increased
pace of strikes that has already happened, not
the plans to increase them still more. At that
level, this story appears to be a shiny object,
one designed to respond to Williams' story, to
try to assert we engage in "surgical targeting"
(a term that appears in both stories; it is
attributed to a senior Administration official
in Miller's), without addressing the possibility
we'll be targeting based solely on patterns of
suspicious behavior soon.

Which leaves the one piece of actual news in
Starr's report: the claim that we've found the
new targets as a result of the killing of Anwar
al-Awlaki.

> The target list of al Qaeda in the
> Arabian Peninsula terrorists the United
> States has developed has emerged since
> an American drone killed Anwar al-Awlaki
> last year in Yemen. Al-Awlaki was
> identified as a key operative, and the
> United States has focused on trying to
> determine the leadership structure that
> has emerged since his death.

Now, the entire premise of the Awlaki strike is
that he was the guy in AQAP who kept insisting
on launching attacks outside of Yemen, targeted
at the US (though the government occasionally
admitted that Ibrahim al-Asiri liked to do that

too, which is good since source have said he was more central to the toner cartridge plot that targeted the US).

Awlaki. The guy.

The claim was you kill him and those in AQAP who want to focus on establishing control over parts of Yemen will have ascendancy. And yet … Starr's sources still insist that we're only hitting those with "a 'direct interest' in attacking the America." [sic]

In short, in addition to the debate in the Administration over whether to start killing bearded men with guns in Yemen because they look dangerous, Starr seems to have unwittingly documented how the goalposts on "direct interest in attacking the America" [sic] have moved.

And that, my friends, is apparently what constitutes an influx of intelligence.

Update: Edited for clarity.