

MORE FAILED TARGETING BASED ON TRAVEL PATTERNS

The other day I noted what happened when the US or its allies applied the standard it is using in the Latif case: targeting people based on claims the route they traveled makes them a terrorist. In Turkey, 34 Kurds were killed because they were using the same path PKK guerrillas use.

In Honduras, our travel-based targeting appears to have killed civilians as well, sparking anti-US outrage in response. On May 11, four Hondurans were killed in a joint DEA-Honduran attack against suspected drug traffickers. It turns out the law enforcement officials (the US claims DEA agents didn't shoot) shot at an unlit boat carrying 4 civilians nearby, not the lit traffickers' boat; the traffickers escaped.

In US denials of fault, they said the unlit boat could not have been civilians, since it was the middle of the night. But it turns out there is a reasonable explanation for their presence.

In fact, Ms. Lezama and her husband say, they were not fishing, as the mayor initially suggested – they were returning from a daily trip in which they dropped off lobster fishermen at the Caribbean coast, coming back with passengers picked up at several spots along the river.

“We’ve been doing this for 25 years, day and night,” Ms. Lezama said. Her husband and other relatives, surrounding her as she lay in bed, nodded. They and other town residents confirmed that the family business had been making the trip for years.

And the spot in the river where the shooting occurred is not as isolated as

Honduran and American officials have suggested.

"The Patuca River is like a highway; it's always full of traffic from the village," said Mayor Lucio Baquedano. Indeed, on Friday afternoon the landing where witnesses said the shooting occurred looked like a taxi stand: about 20 long, skinny boats bobbed in the brown water. A gray Yamaha motor hung from the back of one carrying families east to Brus Laguna, a larger town where Ms. Lezama's boat usually stops. In another sat a red bike, while in a third, a man carried a hunk of freshly cut wood as long and wide as his leg.

Near the end was Ms. Lezama's blue boat. A half dozen gunshot holes could clearly be seen.

"What worries me is that if there are more drugs moving along that river," Mayor Baquedano said, "more of our people are going to be attacked." [my emphasis]

Another common highway Americans didn't recognize as such, seeing instead a route conveying only traffickers.

How many times do you suppose we're going to do this before we learn that common travel routes are not, themselves, evidence of terrorism or trafficking?