

A NEW FORM OF MI “TERRORIST”: THE FRIENDLY FIRE ONE

There was a weird period last spring, as all the fearmongering in the country focused on the underwear bomber sitting in a jail just nineteen miles from me, after the autopsy of an African American imam in Detroit raised new questions about FBI’s pursuit of him as a terrorist, and after some of the only white people indicted under the WMD charges usually reserved for Muslims were arrested in my county, when it felt like Michigan was the melting pot of terrorism. Our local news was full of coverage of the al Qaeda terrorist, the purported black Muslim terrorist, and the alleged Christian militia terrorists all at one time.

Not that it gave me any special wisdom about terrorism, but from my vantage point in MI, self-confident claims about what made and did not make a terrorist always seemed too confident to me.

Which is why I find it particularly tragic that our abstract certainty about who is and who is not a terrorist has led to this: the friendly fire death of two Americans last week—including Navy medic Benjamin Rast from Niles, MI—in a Predator drone strike in Afghanistan.

The investigation is looking into the deaths of a Marine and a Navy medic killed by a Hellfire missile fired from a Predator after they apparently were mistaken for insurgents in southern Afghanistan last week, two senior U.S. defense officials said Tuesday.

[snip]

Marine Staff Sgt. Jeremy Smith of Arlington, Tex., and Seaman Benjamin D. Rast of Niles, Mich., were hit while moving toward other Marines who were

under fire in Helmand province.

Perhaps appropriately, the LAT just laid out in chilling detail the ways in which our drone targeting is prone to human error (the LAT article appeared after Smith and Rast were killed but before DOD admitted they were killed by a drone strike). In an effort to bypass unreliable Afghan partners, we have moved increasingly to targeting people who *act* or *look* like insurgents. But from 15,000 feet above the ground, with analysis conducted 7,000 miles away, it seems Americans own troops can look like insurgents, too.

My condolences to the families and friends of these men. May we learn a lesson from this about the false certainty that drives our war against terrorism.