

NYT: “IMPARTIAL” ... “IMPARTIAL” BUT ANTI- IRAN

Jill Abramson repeats the word “impartial” several times in this interview on the NYT’s Israel-Iran coverage, almost explicitly invoking what Jay Rosen calls the View from Nowhere.

Q: Do you think there have been articles the Times has published that could be considered pro-attack or anti-attack, or has all of the coverage been impartial?

ABRAMSON: I think all of the coverage has been impartial. I think we have had pieces that have looked very skeptically at the intelligence itself as a predicate for any kind of action against Iran. I really do think our coverage has been impartial. When we are reporting about the debate about this, we are conscious to reach out and report on both sides. But at the end of the day, our job in terms of fairness, accuracy, and depth is to report widely enough that we can try to help readers work their way through where the weight of the evidence seems to be at any given time. That’s very difficult right now, because some of the intelligence is contradictory. Getting the nuances right on this is very important. [my emphasis]

But check out how she guarantees that the NYT isn’t getting dragged into justifying another war again.

Q: What are the concerns and considerations you take into account when covering the tensions between Israel and Iran, especially in light of some to the Times’s failures in the build-up to Iraq?

ABRAMSON: The key issue for us is, there's murky intelligence on the current state of Iran's nuclear program. There's no dispute that they have one, the dispute is Iran saying that it's for civilian use, and other intelligence saying that it could be for military use.

The debate, at least in Washington, is a little more limited than in 2003, because we're talking about something that – either on the Israeli end or more broadly – would be a targeted military strike. It's not the kind of debate we had in 2003 about a full-blown boots on the ground invasion.

In 2003, the Times had flawed coverage on the intelligence concerning WMD. I think a big factual difference is that at least the administration as it shapes its policy is not actively promoting a policy to strike Iran. That's a huge, fundamental difference. [my emphasis]

Now, to the NYT's credit, it is the newspaper that (under Abramson's guidance) reported that an Israeli strike would set off a regional war including the US. But given that, how does Abramson conclude that this would be nothing more than a targeted strike?

And particularly given that reporting (that a targeted strike really amounts to starting a regional war), note the problem with Abramson's reassurance that because the Administration is not "actively promoting" a policy to strike Iran, it ensures the NYT's coverage cannot be flawed.

To strike or not to strike is not necessarily the correct pole here, even if issues like this were as simple as Abramson's two-sided debate. Even before you get to that question, you need to unpack the "to undermine Iran's bid for hegemony in the Middle East to reinforce the

Sunni-Israeli hegemonic position” presumption.
Or even the “in spite of all our problems with
Pakistan, Iran is the biggest nuke threat”
presumption.

Abramson doesn’t seem to be remotely aware that,
even aside from her embrace of false balance
over accuracy, she’s unquestioningly embraced
the stance the Administration is, for the most
part, aggressively pushing, that suggesting that
Iran is the biggest problem we face in the
Middle East and one that must be solved.

Ah well. That’s not—by any shade—the funniest
part of this interview. The funniest part is
where Abramson says the NYT needs sources to
report on AIPAC’s meeting and general influence.