

JOHN BRENNAN, LIAR

Since Jo Becker co-wrote the Angler series in the WaPo with Barton Gellman, her long piece today with Scott Shane will be seen as the Obama version of that story: how he evades the law to pursue ruthless counterterrorism policies.

I'll have more to say about the story later. But for now, let me note how it proves, pretty definitively, that John Brennan is a liar.

The story describes Obama being informed, just days after his confirmation, that a drone strike had killed civilians.

Just days after taking office, the president got word that the first strike under his administration had killed a number of innocent Pakistanis. "The president was very sharp on the thing, and said, 'I want to know how this happened,' " a top White House adviser recounted.

Now, who do you suppose informed Obama of this (see update below—it was Michael Hayden)? And who do you suppose was involved in discussions of it? I find it inconceivable to believe that John Brennan was out of the loop on that news, particularly as Obama responded by using less powerful missiles for drones to lessen collateral damage. John Brennan learned, in the first days of the Administration, that we had killed civilians.

And yet Brennan repeatedly and publicly has claimed there had been no civilian casualties.

The NYT story acknowledges Brennan's comments (and probably quotes him again, anonymously, in this passage).

This counting method may partly explain the official claims of extraordinarily low collateral deaths. In a speech last year Mr. Brennan, Mr. Obama's trusted adviser, said that not a single

noncombatant had been killed in a year of strikes. And in a recent interview, a senior administration official said that the number of civilians killed in drone strikes in Pakistan under Mr. Obama was in the “single digits” – and that independent counts of scores or hundreds of civilian deaths unwittingly draw on false propaganda claims by militants.

If Brennan is indeed that anonymous source, then it means NYT presented evidence he lied his ass off—though didn’t call him on it—and then went back to him for more bullshit lies.

The story seems to accept as serious the funny accounting the Administration uses to pretend civilian drone deaths didn’t happen.

Mr. Obama embraced a disputed method for counting civilian casualties that did little to box him in. It in effect counts all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants, according to several administration officials, unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent.

But others (I’m guessing Dennis Blair is one of these) recognize this is all phony accounting.

The C.I.A. accounting has so troubled some administration officials outside the agency that they have brought their concerns to the White House. One called it “guilt by association” that has led to “deceptive” estimates of civilian casualties.

“It bothers me when they say there were seven guys, so they must all be militants,” the official said. “They count the corpses and they’re not really sure who they are.”

I guess it’s opposition like this that causes

the White House to bring its drone war into the White House, to be overseen solely by John Brennan, so they can continue to pretend that all the dead teenage boys (including, of course, US citizen Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, who would also be counted as a fighter using these rules) were our enemies.

Update: Here's TBIJ's description of that strike.

The first Obama fatal strike killed between seven and twelve people, reported initially as 'foreign militants'. In a later report personally given to Obama by his then-CIA chief General Hayden, the Agency admitted missing its high value target and killing 'five al Qaeda militants', but made no mention of civilian deaths (Bob Woodward). However Newsweek reported in May 2012 that the President was made aware that civilians had died almost immediately.

Between seven and eleven civilians, mostly of one family and including one child, reportedly died. Another boy survived with terrible injuries, as Der Spiegel reported at the time: '14-year-old Fahim Qureshi, lost his left eye, suffered a fractured skull and was hit by several shards in the stomach.' In February 2012 Pakistan lawyer Mirza Shahzad Akbar filed a case with the UN Human Rights Council citing this attack amongst others:

Ejaz Ahmad is a resident of Hasu Khel, North Wazir Ali, North Waziristan, Pakistan. On Friday, January 23, 2009, he was in the village of Hasu Khel. 3-4 kilometers away, in the village of Zeraki, his cousin, Faheem Qureshi, and a number of his other relatives were gathered at the house of Mohammad Khaleel, a

retired school teacher. Also present were Khaleel's son and Qureshi's 8th grade classmate [14-year old] Azaz-ur-Rehman; Mansoor-ur-Rehman, a teacher at the boys' school in Zeraki; and Kushdil Khan, Ahmad's maternal uncle who owned a hardware store in Meer Ali. In addition, Ubaid Ullah, Rafiq Ullah, and Safat Ullah were also present [described elsewhere as farmers].

At around 5 PM that day, a missile struck the house, reducing it to rubble and killing everyone inside except Faheem Qureshi. Qureshi suffered the loss of an eye, and was struck in the stomach by shrapnel, requiring a major operation. He also suffered a skull fracture and damage to his ear drum, resulting in the loss of hearing in one ear. Upon hearing the blast from his nearby village Hasu Khel, Ahmad immediately went to the scene of the strike. He found only the bodies of those listed above. There were no foreign nationals at the house and none of his relatives had any connection to terrorism or terrorist activity; they were innocent villagers.

The Bureau's researchers added a further four names identified as civilians and reportedly killed in the strike: *'Shams, Noor, Majid, and Siraj. They belonged to the Dawar tribe. Siraj was the nephew of former Member of Parliament, Maulana Muhammad Deendar, from North Waziristan . He belonged to*

the religious party, JUI-F.'

*Location: Zharki, Mir Ali, North
Waziristan.*

Was Woodward relying on that proven liar, John
Brennan, too?