

UNDIEBOMB 2.0: DEFYING THE TREND

In his story describing the lowered standards for drone strikes the other day, Greg Miller described multiple officials admitting that we're increasing the number of drone strikes in Yemen even though there's no evidence more people are "migrat[ing]" to join AQAP.

U.S. officials said the pace has accelerated [in the last five months] even though there has not been a proliferation in the number of plots, or evidence of a significantly expanded migration of militants to join AQAP.

That may conflict with John Brennan's claims that AQAP has tripled in size since the UndieBomber 1.0. It may suggest that that growth all took place before the last year. Or it may suggest—particularly given the use of the word "migration"—that these officials are distinguishing between non-Yemenis and local insurgents allying with AQAP.

Whichever it is, the NCTC just reported, last year attacks from AQAP didn't go up either—in fact, they went down slightly.

Attacks by AQ and its affiliates increased by 8 percent from 2010 to 2011. A significant increase in attacks by al-Shabaab, from 401 in 2010 to 544 in 2011, offset a sharp decline in attacks by al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) and a smaller decline in attacks by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Everyone but John Brennan—who has a history of lying about drone strikes—seems to be saying that the risk from terrorism, while still real, is going down in Yemen, not up.

UndieBomb Plot 2.0, to the limited degree that

it was a general plan of Ibrahim al-Asiri and not a plot from Mohammed bin Nayef, appears to defy the trend.

Which brings me to something that's been gnawing at me about the public claims about UndieBomb 2.0.

Imagine you're Ibrahim al-Asiri. A Saudi-Brit shows up, trains, impresses the trainers. He offers to do a suicide mission and—while you don't meet with him personally—the trainers decide to send him off on UndieBomb Plot 2.0. He leaves and you wait, and wait, and wait. And ... nothing. That is, according to all the people complaining that the AP reported the government had thwarted a plot, what the government had intended.

If you're AQAP, wouldn't it be more suspicious hearing nothing about the guy who just walked off with your UndieBomb than hearing John Brennan boasting that he had thwarted the UndieBomb. Not bragging that the Saudis had infiltrated AQAP, which is what Brennan ended up bragging about. Just a big dog-and-pony about thwarting an attack, as the Administration did when it intercepted the toner cartridge plot.

Probably, the AP's version of the story is correct and the Administration planned a dog-and-pony show, which would have left Asiri with the impression that the Saudi-Brit was what he appeared to be, an aspiring suicide bomber that got caught.

One alternative is that UndieBomber 2.0 actually absconded with an UndieBomb, but intended to go back into AQAP and continue to collect information. I wonder, though: Giving the increasing number of targets in Yemen, you'd think it'd be at least as important to collect information about AQAP plans in Yemen as to obtain the latest UndieBomb in the guise of an attack on the US.

But I'm puzzled by the claim that the Administration wasn't going to announce they had thwarted the plot. That doesn't make sense.