

GOOD THING JOHN BRENNAN DIDN'T HAVE TO FOLLOW HIS "RULE BOOK" WHEN HE KILLED ADNAN AL-QADHI

The other day, I suggested that the "rule book" John Brennan reportedly rushed to finish in case Mitt won but apparently backed off since may have been an effort to refute Michael Hayden's criticisms of Obama's counterterrorism strategy. Hayden has suggested that by using drones rather than torture, the Obama Administration has embraced a more ethically problematic approach.

I was just speculating, of course, that the "rule book" was nothing more than a show for the benefit of Hayden, to try to pretend the drone program wasn't as ad hoc as it looks and as Hayden has suggested.

Yet I find it interesting that less than a day after Mitt Romney didn't win the election, Brennan's drone program took out a Yemeni who—by local accounts, at least—could have easily have been captured.

American counterterrorism officials have painted drone strikes as a tool of last resort, utilized only when targets represent an imminent threat and are nearly impossible to take out by other means. But people in Beit al Ahmar say it's hard to argue that [Adnan al-Qadhi's capture would have been out of the question. He'd already been arrested, and released, before, in 2008 after an attack on the American Embassy. And Beit al Ahmar, nine miles outside Yemen's capital, Sanaa, is no isolated enclave — it's the birthplace of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and home to much of the military's leadership.

Sitting less than an hour's drive from the capital, residents here say Qadhi could have been captured easily.

[snip]

Few here dispute Qadhi's open sympathy toward AQAP. After all, the target's house, modest compared to nearby fortress-like compounds, sticks out because of a mural on one side that shows al Qaida's signature black flag.

But his relatives and associates say there's more nuance to Qadhi's story. While he was labeled as a local leader of AQAP after his death, as recently as last winter he'd participated on a team that mediated between the government and AQAP-linked militants who'd seized control of the central town of Rada.

Back in April—the last time Drone Assassination Czar John Brennan was making a big show of the purported order of his drone program—here's some of what he said about who the US targeted with drones.

Even if it is lawful to pursue a specific member of al-Qaida, we ask ourselves whether that individual's activities rise to a certain threshold for action, and whether taking action will, in fact, enhance our security. For example, when considering lethal force we ask ourselves whether the individual poses a significant threat to U.S. interests. This is absolutely critical, and it goes to the very essence of why we take this kind of exceptional action.

[snip]

I am not referring to some hypothetical threat, the mere possibility that a member of al-Qaida might try to attack us at some point in the future. A significant threat might be posed by an

individual who is an operational leader of al-Qaida or one of its associated forces. Or perhaps the individual is himself an operative, in the midst of actually training for or planning to carry out attacks against U.S. persons and interests.

[snip]

In addition, our unqualified preference is to only undertake lethal force when we believe that capturing the individual is not feasible. [my emphasis]

Of course, I've suggested that the entire speech was bullshit, just an attempt to prepare an intent-based defense in case Brennan ever got in trouble for killing so many illegitimate targets.

But the case of Adnan al-Qadhi appears to show that John Brennan can't even follow the rules he has claimed publicly he follows.

And that bit about whether or not a particular drone strike would enhance our security?

Here's what al-Qadhi's villagers—who up until this strike were peaceful—have to say about the strike.

In the center of the village, a farmer named Abduljaber Saber held forth on the strike with his neighbors, calling the attack a violation of the rule of law, casting it as an example of "American hypocrisy."

His neighbor, Mohamed Abdulwali, took a break from repairing a water canister to chime in: "Any action has a reaction. Any violence will breed violence."

John Brennan, the priest-like assassination czar, doesn't seem to be following his own rules.