

LIKE OBI WAN, OSAMA BIN LADEN HAS COME BACK MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER BEFORE

In a piece that serves only to claim we need even more invasive online surveillance because we've made al Qaeda more insidious than before Osama bin Laden died, Michael Hirsh tries to make Abu Musab al-Suri the new boogeyman (who, as J.M. Berger notes, may not even be alive!).

The truth is much grimmer. Intelligence officials and terrorism experts today believe that the death of bin Laden and the decimation of the Qaida "core" in Pakistan only set the stage for a rebirth of al-Qaida as a global threat. Its tactics have morphed into something more insidious and increasingly dangerous as safe havens multiply in war-torn or failed states—at exactly the moment we are talking about curtailing the National Security Agency's monitoring capability. And the jihadist who many terrorism experts believe is al-Qaida's new strategic mastermind, Abu Musab al-Suri (a nom de guerre that means "the Syrian"), has a diametrically different approach that emphasizes quantity over quality. The red-haired, blue-eyed former mechanical engineer was born in Aleppo in 1958 as Mustafa Setmariam Nasar; he has lived in France and Spain. Al-Suri is believed to have helped plan the 2004 train bombings in Madrid and the 2005 bombings in London—and has been called the "Clausewitz" of the new al-Qaida.

[snip]

But the agency's opponents may not realize that the practice they most hope

to stop—its seemingly indiscriminate scouring of phone data and emails—is precisely what intelligence officials say they need to detect the kinds of plots al-Suri favors.

[snip]

And the consensus of senior defense and intelligence officials in the U.S. government is that **NSA surveillance may well be the only thing that can stop the next terrorist from blowing apart innocent Americans, as happened in Boston last April.** “Al-Qaida is far more a problem a dozen years after 9/11 than it was back then,” [Navy Postgraduate School expert John] Arquilla says.

[snip]

Officials also say they need more intelligence than ever to determine which of the multifarious new jihadist groups is a true threat. “The really difficult strategic question for us is which one of these groups do we take on,” [Michael] Hayden says. “If you jump too quickly and you put too much of a generic American face on it, then you may make them mad at us when they weren’t before. So we are going to need a pretty nuanced and sophisticated understanding of where these new groups are going and where we need to step up and intervene.”

Some officials suggest that to do that—to discriminate carefully between the terrorists who are directly targeting U.S. interests and those who aren’t—the United States needs to step up, not slow down, the NSA’s monitoring of potential targets. [my emphasis]

Hirsh doesn’t seem to notice it, but even while he quotes former and current architects of our counterterrorism strategy like Michael Hayden

and Mike Rogers, if his tale is to be believed, you have to also believe those former and current counterterrorism leaders committed these grave counterterrorism failures:

- Allowing no fewer than 25 failed states to flourish, especially in Yemen, Somalia, Syria, Libya, and Iraq
- Failing to win or even establish governance in Afghanistan
- Rendering al-Suri to Syria where he may or may not have been let free
- Taking on Bashar al-Assad (who the article admits provided us counterterrorism support, including presumably proxy torturing al-Suri) even while not backing dictators who provide counterterrorism support during the Arab Spring
- Abandoning Syrian rebels to Assad

Then Hirsh goes on to recite the debunked claims about how useful the Section 215 dragnet is (though curiously, he doesn't mention Basaaly Moalin, perhaps because elsewhere Harold Koh admits that even most members of al-Shabaab aren't members of al Qaeda, much less those who materially support al-Shabaab), how that would have (and, the implication is) and is the only thing that might have prevented 9/11.

Hirsh doesn't even seem to notice that he repeats the claim that only NSA dragnets can

prevent a Boston Marathon attack, yet NSA dragnets didn't prevent the Boston Marathon attack.

Obviously, the whole thing is just as Mike Rogers/Michael Hayden sponsored advertisement to pass DiFi's Fake FISA Fix (the article doesn't address why she doesn't just accept the status quo).

But in the process, Hirsh has instead laid out solid evidence we should never trust the people who've been running our war on terror for the last 12 years, because, if even a fraction of what he claims is true, they've actually made us far less safe.