

WEEKS AFTER MISSING CLAIMED RUSSIAN BOMB PLOT, US AND UK TAKE OUT JIHADI JOHN

Politico has a big piece tied to a Showtime documentary on the living CIA Directors. As should be expected of a collection of paid liars, there are a lot of myths and score settling, most notably with expanded George Tenet claims about the strength of the warnings he gave about 9/11.

But I'm most interested in this insight, which seems very apt given recent intelligence failures and successes.

What's the CIA's mission? Is it a spy agency? Or a secret army? "Sometimes I think we get ourselves into a frenzy—into believing that killing is the only answer to a problem," says Tenet. "And the truth is, it's not. That's not what our reason for existence is." When Petraeus became CIA director, his predecessor, Hayden took him aside. Never before, Hayden warned him, had the agency become so focused on covert military operations at the expense of intelligence gathering. *"An awful lot of what we now call analysis in the American intelligence community is really targeting,"* Hayden says. "Frankly, that has been at the expense of the broader, more global view. We're safer because of it, but it has not been cost-free. Some of the things we do to keep us safe for the close fight—for instance, targeted killings—can make it more difficult to resolve the deep fight, the ideological fight. We feed the jihadi recruitment video that these Americans are heartless killers."

This is, of course, the counterpoint to Hayden's claim that "we kill people based on metadata." But it says much more: it describes how we're viewing the world in terms of targets to kill rather than people to influence or views to understand. Hayden argues that prevents us from seeing the broader view, which may include both theaters where we're not actively killing people but also wider trends.

Which is why I'm so interested in the big festival the US and UK – David Cameron, especially (of course, he's in the middle of an effort to get Parliament to rubber stamp the existing British dragnet) – are engaging in with the presumed drone-killing of Mohammed Emwazi, nicknamed Jihadi John by the press.

Given that ISIS has plenty of other fighters capable of executing prisoners, some even that speak British accented English, this drone-killing seems to be more about show, the vanquishing of a public figure rather than a functional leader – contrary to what David Cameron says. As WaPo notes,

"If this strike was successful, and we still await confirmation of that, it will be a strike at the heart of ISIL," Cameron said, using an acronym for the Islamic State.

Cameron alternated between speaking about Emwazi in the past and the present tenses, describing him as a "barbaric murderer" who was the Islamic State's "lead executioner."

"This was an act of self defense. It was the right thing to do," he said.

[snip]

But it is not clear that Emwazi had a meaningful role in Islamic State's leadership structure. Analysts said the impact of his possible death could be limited.

“Implications? None beyond the symbolism,” said a Twitter message from Shiraz Maher, an expert on extremism at King’s College London.

It also might be a way to permanently silence questions about the role that British targeting of Emwazi had in further radicalizing him.

And all this comes just a few weeks after ISIS affiliates in Egypt claim to have brought down a Russian plane – depending on how you count, the largest terrorist attack since 9/11. Clearly, the combined British and US dragnet did not manage to prevent the attack, but there are even indications GCHQ, at least, wasn’t the agency that first picked up chatter about it.

Information from the intelligence agency of another country, rather than Britain’s own, led the Government to conclude that a bomb probably brought down the Russian airliner that crashed in the Sinai.

It was reports from an undisclosed “third party” agency, rather than Britain’s own GCHQ, that revealed the so-called “chatter” among extremists after the disaster that killed all 224 passengers and crew – and ended with the suspension of all British flights to Sharm el-Sheikh, according to authoritative sources.

British officials are said to have asked whether the same information had also been passed to Egypt, and were told that it had.

[snip]

Sources declined to say which friendly country passed the information. The US and Israel – whose own borders have been threatened by Isis in Sinai – as well as Arab nations in the region all have an interest in monitoring activity in the

█ area.

So while it's all good that the Americans and Brits took out an ISIS executioner in Syria – thereby avenging the deaths of their country men – it's not like this great dragnet is doing what it always promises to do: prevent attacks, or even understand them quickly.

Perhaps that's because, while we approach ever closer to “collect[ing] it all,” we're targeting rather than analyzing the data?