REVISITING THE AL-HARITHI/DERWISH ASSASSINATION

I wanted to expand on this comment, because the discussion of whether Anwar al-Awlaki is on both the JSOC and CIA kill lists or not has focused new attention on the assassination, on November 3, 2002, of Abu Ali al-Harithi and Kamal Derwish.

Greg Miller mentions the assassination in his story today.

> The CIA has carried out Predator attacks in Yemen since at least 2002, when a drone strike killed six suspected Al Qaeda operatives traveling in a vehicle across desert terrain.
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> The agency knew that one of the operatives was an American, Kamal Derwish, who was among those killed. Derwish was never on the CIA's target list, officials said, and the strike was aimed at a senior Al Qaeda operative, Qaed Sinan Harithi, accused of orchestrating the 2000 attack on the U.S. destroyer Cole.

Dana Priest mentions the assassination in her story on escalated operations in Yemen.

> In November 2002, a CIA missile strike killed six al-Qaeda operatives driving through the desert. The target was Abu Ali al-Harithi, organizer of the 2000 attack on the USS Cole. Killed with him was a U.S. citizen, Kamal Derwish, who the CIA knew was in the car.

And ABC mentions it as well.

> An American citizen with suspected al Qaeda ties was killed in Nov. 2002 in

> Yemen in a CIA predator strike that was aimed at non-American leaders of al Qaeda. The death of the American citizen, Ahmed Hijazi of Lackawanna, NY, was justified as "collateral damage" at the time because he "was just in the wrong place at the wrong time," said a former U.S. official familiar with the case.

Now, all of these articles were written by journalists with long experience in intelligence reporting, so all must know this detail. Still, I find the inclusion of it in all three stories (including Priest's, in which the focus is on Yemen, rather than assassination) rather notable. Is it possible that all the guys leaking this story have pointed the journalists to the earlier assassination?

I ask because—for starters—I find it rather interesting that that 2002 assassination was rationalized in the name of killing al-Harithi, accused of organizing the USS Cole bombing. That strike happened not long after the US started torturing a guy—Rahim al-Nashiri—whom we're about to try in military commission for organizing the USS Cole bombing. (And remember, al-Nashiri had been in custody in Dubai for a month by the time the US took custody.) Who was the mastermind of the Cole bombing, then? al-Harithi, who doesn't even merit a mention in the 9/11 Commission report (though reports from when he was killed said he was among the 12 most senior al Qaeda figures), or al-Nashiri, who does, and is about to be tried for it? Note, too, that the Bush Administration did not announce it had custody of al-Nashiri until several weeks later in November.

Now compare al-Harithi, with his loosely accused role in the Cole, with Kamal Derwish, whom the US accused of recruiting a number of Lackawanna youth into al Qaeda. Not only was Derwish accused of being an ongoing threat—the standard purportedly used to put Americans on kill lists now. But he was accused of training Americans in

al Qaeda. Which is not all that different than what the government is accusing al-Awlaki of now.

And note, too, that Priest and maybe Miller [ed. changed per MD's comment] both now report that the CIA knew Derwish was in the car when they targeted (they say) al-Harithi. When Miller first reported this in 2002, he didn't mention Derwish's presence (nor did Pincus). When Priest broke the story of Derwish's presence in the car, she stated it was unclear whether CIA knew he was there or not.

> It was unclear whether the CIA operatives who fired the missile from hundreds of miles away knew that an American citizen was among their targets. It also was unclear whether that would have made any difference.

I guess I'm suggesting that, first of all, it would seem unnecessary to kill a guy for planning the Cole bombing if you knew you had the guy who—you say—planned the Cole bombing in custody. But that claiming a tie between him and the Cole bombing might provide the excuse to target a car carrying your real target, Derwish.