

IS THE “ROGER” PROFILE YET ANOTHER INFOOP IN SUPPORT OF SIGNATURE STRIKES?

Greg Miller got a lot of buzz this weekend for his profile of the head of CTC, whom he calls “Roger.” The article is in no way unbalanced—Miller makes it clear that Roger is an asshole and suggests he might bear some responsibility for the Khost bombing.

But I couldn’t help but wonder whether the story was another in a series of articles designed to pressure David Petraeus to resume signature strikes—those drone strikes that target a pattern rather than an individual high level target.

After all, the article ends by conflating a description of Roger’s effort to push signature strikes with Osama bin Laden’s killing.

“He came in with a big idea on a cold, rainy Friday afternoon,” said a former high-ranking CIA official involved in drone operations. “It was a new flavor of activity, and had to do with taking senior terrorists off the battlefield.”

The former official declined to describe the activity. But others said the CTC chief proposed launching what came to be known as “signature strikes,” meaning attacks on militants based solely on their patterns of behavior.

Previously, the agency had needed confirmation of the presence of an approved al-Qaeda target before it could shoot. With permission from the White House, it would begin hitting militant gatherings even when it wasn’t clear that a specific operative was in the drone’s crosshairs.

Roger's relentless approach meshed with the Obama mind-set. Shortly after taking office, Obama met with his first CIA director, Leon E. Panetta, and ordered a redoubled effort in the fight against al-Qaeda and the search for the terrorist group's elusive leader.

From 53 strikes in 2009, the number soared to 117 in 2010, before tapering off last year.

The cumulative toll helped to crumple al-Qaeda even as CTC analysts finally found a courier trail that led them to bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Yet it somehow neglects to mention why the signature strikes tailed off: because last March's Shiga strike—launched over our Ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter's, objections in the days after the Raymond Davis release, and killing a significant number of civilians set off an extended debate in the Administration over the relative value of the signature strikes. The debate ended by giving newly confirmed CIA Director Petraeus final say over signature strikes, which has resulted, thus far, in a move away from their use.

Which makes both the explicit reference to David Petraeus...

Along the way, he has clashed with high-ranking figures, including David H. Petraeus, the U.S. military commander in Iraq and Afghanistan, who at times objected to the CIA's more pessimistic assessments of those wars. Former CIA officials said the two had to patch over their differences when Petraeus became CIA director.

"No officer in the agency has been more relentless, focused, or committed to the fight against al-Qaeda than has the chief of the Counterterrorism Center,"

Petraeus said in a statement provided to The Post.

... And an anonymous complaint attributed to someone who could be Petraeus so interesting.

"He's sandpaper" and "not at all a team player," said a former senior U.S. military official who worked closely with the CIA.

CTC's drone cowboys have been pushing Petraeus to resume signature strikes for some time. I wonder whether this profile of "Roger," along with the implicit threat he'll quit, is part of that campaign.