

MIKE MORELL'S PERFORMANCE OF "INTELLIGENCE"

Given that Bill Harlow co-wrote George Tenet and Jose Rodriguez' autobiographical novels, it's fairly clear he continues to propagandize for the CIA years after he left the Agency as Public Affairs officer. Still, his past autobiographical novels were perhaps more convincing than the roll out of Mike Morell's autobiographical novel, *The Great War of Our Time*, which Harlow also co-wrote. That's pretty remarkable given that Morell had more retained credibility than either of the other two. This propaganda tour actually seems to be eroding Morell's credibility.

Part of the problem is interviews like this, where Morell says *both* that we should be "all in" with Saudi Arabia (an asinine judgement, in my opinion, perhaps betraying CIA's close ties to the Saudis) and that we should support secular Bashar al-Assad, which is totally inconsistent with his first stance.

And he makes those two claims in an interview where he also claims that numbers on collateral damage tied to drone strikes are "propaganda."

"The other thing I'll say is that this is the most precise weapon in the U.S. arsenal. Collateral damage is not zero – and gosh, I wish it were zero, but it's not – but it's very close to zero.

"Number three, the numbers that you see about huge numbers of collateral damage just aren't true. They are put out there as propaganda by people who want this program to go away, and al-Qaida is one of those groups."

It's a great display of Morell's approach to lying.

First, most people don't claim there are huge numbers of collateral damage. TBIJ – which is both one of the more partisan voices against drone strikes but which also does some of the most meticulous work tracking drone killing over years – shows that civilians amount for around 14% of those killed (a lower number than some more hawkish counts). The number itself is not, as Morell depicts it, "huge." But it is, nevertheless, a relatively large amount, one that brings with it a lot of blowback. And the numbers – which again, are similar to those tracked by multiple independent sources – are much higher than CIA publicly claims.

It is CIA, and not drone killing trackers, engaged in propaganda here.

Yet by refuting something his opponents hadn't asserted, Morell gets to claim to have debunked it.

While I have no idea what part of Sy Hersh's story on Osama bin Laden are true, Morell's use of the same method to debunk Hersh suggests he's engaged – at least partly – in non-denial denial.

Jeff Stein deals with one problem with Morell's debunking. CIA's former Deputy Director claims that if we had tipped the Pakistanis (who are dealt with as a monolith in Morell's story) they would have told Osama bin Laden. Wouldn't that require knowledge of where he was, and some ongoing interest in protecting him? If so, that actually confirms a key premise of Hersh's (and other reporters') stories.

Then there's Morell's debunking of the walk-in story.

He claims that we learned of bin Laden's location not from following the courier and from excellent intelligence analysis, but from a Pakistani intelligence officer who walked into the U.S. Embassy and gave us bin Laden's whereabouts in exchange for "much of the \$25 million reward offered by the U.S."

The truth is that while walk-ins have long been useful in providing intelligence to us world-wide, none of the information that led to finding the location where bin Laden was came from walk-ins.

NBC has already confirmed that there was a walk-in – just that he wasn't key to identifying OBL's location.

***Editor's Note:** This story has been updated since it was first published. The original version of this story said that a Pakistani asset told the U.S. where bin Laden was hiding. Sources say that while the asset provided information vital to the hunt for bin Laden, he was not the source of his whereabouts.*

Morell's statement is utterly consistent with NBC's reporting.

Morell claims to debunk Hersh's claim that CIA obtained DNA from OBL.

bin Laden was very ill, and that early on in his confinement at Abbottabad, the ISI had ordered Amir Aziz, a doctor and a major in the Pakistani army, to move nearby to provide treatment.

[snip]

The planners turned for help to Kayani and Pasha, who asked Aziz to obtain the specimens. Soon after the raid the press found out that Aziz had been living in a house near the bin Laden compound: local reporters discovered his name in Urdu on a plate on the door. Pakistani officials denied that Aziz had any connection to bin Laden, but the retired official told me that Aziz had been rewarded with a share of the \$25 million reward the US had put up because the DNA sample had

showed conclusively that it was bin Laden in Abbottabad.

But Morell focuses on obtaining DNA from the compound and from OBL's children, not from OBL himself.

Mr. Hersh says we obtained DNA samples **from people in the bin Laden compound** before the assault was launched. Wrong again. We would have liked to have obtained samples from the children in the compound to confirm that they were **bin Laden's children**, but we did not. [my emphasis]

And Morell claims Hersh's claim that SEALs couldn't have thrown OBL body parts out the helicopter over the Hindu Kush ...

The remains, including his head, which had only a few bullet holes in it, were thrown into a body bag and, during the helicopter flight back to Jalalabad, some body parts were tossed out over the Hindu Kush mountains – or so the Seals claimed.

... Because he received a burial at sea.

Finally—and most absurdly perhaps—Mr. Hersh cites his sources as telling him that SEALs threw bin Laden body parts off their helicopter over the Hindu Kush and suggests that the burial at sea from the USS Carl Vinson never happened. Bin Laden's body received a proper Muslim burial at sea. How do I know? I heard the president give the order, and I saw photographs and video of the burial at sea.

Now, to be fair, this is one claim from Hersh I'm most skeptical of (though I realize now the SEALs might have thrown some body parts out the helicopter to leave DNA evidence that OBL was

killed there, which was the purported cover story). But Morell's debunking is no such thing, because it is perfectly possible a shrouded corpse could be buried at sea even if it were missing some body parts. (I'll also note that JSOC hid what I believe to be trophy photos after this story started breaking, which suggests the SEALs did something with the corpse that would cause problems if it were publicized, though I always assumed they just hammed it up.)

In other words, as Morell does for his drone propaganda, he usually doesn't debunk what Hersh wrote, but instead something else.

Which is a suggestion that he's engaged in another cover story.