

JAKE TAPPER FLUMMOXES JAY CARNEY ON WHITE HOUSE PRESS POLICY HYPOCRISY

We take broadside shots at the press fairly regularly, both directly and as a vehicle for explaining ills and issues surrounding the government and, at least in my case, law. And there have been plenty of said shots aimed at the White House press over the years (stenographers!) and, pretty much, well earned. But fair is fair, and when there is good work done, it should be pointed out every now and then too. Today is a day for that.

At today's White House press briefing, Jake Tapper of ABC News bored straight into WH Press Secretary Jay Carney, and it was a thing of beauty. The briefing opened with Carney evincing praise for the two journalists who died last night covering the Syrian popular uprising and resultant government crackdown and oppression, Marie Colvin and Rémi Ochlik as well as the New York Times' recently deceased, Anthony Shadid. There is little doubt but that Carney, and the White House, have genuine sadness over the deaths. But Carney, on behalf of the White House, was taking it further and using them as shaded vehicle for political posturing and Tapper flat out called him on it. The exchange transcript, from Jake and ABC News:

TAPPER: The White House keeps praising these journalists who are – who've been killed –

CARNEY: I don't know about "keep" – I think –

TAPPER: You've done it, Vice President Biden did it in a statement. How does that square with the fact that this

administration has been so aggressively trying to stop aggressive journalism in the United States by using the Espionage Act to take whistleblowers to court? You're – currently I think that you've invoked it the sixth time, and before the Obama administration, it had only been used three times in history. You're – this is the sixth time you're suing a CIA officer for allegedly providing information in 2009 about CIA torture. Certainly that's something that's in the public interest of the United States. The administration is taking this person to court. There just seems to be disconnect here. You want aggressive journalism abroad; you just don't want it in the United States.

CARNEY: Well, I would hesitate to speak to any particular case, for obvious reasons, and I would refer you to the Department of Justice for more on that. I think we absolutely honor and praise the bravery of reporters who are placing themselves in extremely dangerous situations in order to bring a story of oppression and brutality to the world. I think that is commendable, and it's certainly worth noting by us. And as somebody who knew both Anthony and Marie, I particularly appreciate what they did to bring that story to the American people.

I – as for other cases, again, without addressing any specific case, I think that there are issues here that involve highly sensitive classified information, and I think that, you know, those are – divulging or to – divulging that kind of information is a serious issue, and it always has been.

TAPPER: So the truth should come out abroad; it shouldn't come out here?

CARNEY: Well, that's not at all what I'm

saying, Jake, and you know it's not.
Again, I can't – specific –

TAPPER: That's what the Justice
Department's doing.

CARNEY: Well, you're making a judgment
about a broad array of cases, and I
can't address those specifically.

TAPPER: It's also the judgment that a
lot of whistleblowers' organizations and
good government groups are making as
well.

CARNEY: Not one that I'm going to make.

That is good work. Clearly Carney was not ready for such a pointed line of questioning, and tried to shine it on by going back and trying to hide behind the fallen reporters. But Jake Tapper was having none of it and kept boring in. It was an example of not needing to get an answer to make a solid point. Frankly, I think it would be a very good thing if there was a *lot more* of this done in the face of the pablum shoved out daily by government spokesmen, of which the White House Press Shop is merely the most public, and glaring, example.

Lastly, and this is not a criticism in the least, because I think it is fairly clear Jake tapped Carney out about as far as he could in the exchange today, but I would like to see him, or another reporter, go back at Carney on not just the Obama Administration's attack on leakers, but the pernicious and chilling attacks on the press themselves. It is an easy out for Carney to say he cannot talk about defendants and cases, but he can sure be questioned about the consistent policy of chilling reporters such as Jim Risen and Siobhan Gorman.

If you really want to show the hypocrisy, there is the story that is not emphasized enough. The Bush DOJ had subpoenaed Risen in the Sterling matter for the grand jury phase, but dropped it when he moved to quash. The Obama

Administration, once again going to extremes even the much maligned Bush/Cheney one would not, reinstated the effort to haul Risen in front of a grand jury on Sterling and break his source protection. Judge Leonie Brinkema quashed the effort rather sharply.

But the DOJ has now gone after Risen a third time in their effort to squelch the ability of reporters to interact with sources, and protect the relationship. Even after Brinkema granted limited questioning of Risen at trial, that was not enough, the DOJ has appealed to get more. The thing is, the government does not need more from Risen to try Jeffrey Sterling, and that finding was made and supported well by Judge Brinkema. It is gratuitous and meant to chill the press, not just leakers. It is not just me saying that, it is a coalition of 29 news organizations, including ABC News.

Jake Tapper clearly flummoxed Carney on the White House press reporters hypocrisy, even if just a bit. A followup round further pointing out the even deeper underlying hypocrisy in the direct attacks on the press would be even better. Thanks to Jake for today, how about a rematch for Round Two?