

IF THE ONLY NEWS IS GOOD NEWS AND THERE IS NO NEWS ...?

Tara McKelvey, the woman who wrote one of the most detailed stories on drone targeting (which has subsequently gotten John Rizzo into some trouble), has a CJR piece on the problems of reporting on drones. The whole thing is worth reading, but I want to take a number of quotes McKelvey includes out of order, starting with David Ignatius, noting the Administration's flexibility in secrecy rules.

Ignatius, of the *Post*, explained that Obama administration officials are sometimes willing to discuss drone operations in an attempt to promote the White House's counterterrorism strategy. In February 2010, for instance, Ignatius was able to write a detailed account of the escalation of drone strikes because officials were eager to demonstrate that Obama was more aggressive in his pursuit of al Qaeda than Bush was.

"These rules about covert activities can be bent when it becomes politically advantageous," Ignatius said. "When it suits them, you get quite a detailed readout."

That's a sentiment Jonathan Landay echoes.

Journalists know that finding non-official sources is crucial in covering the drone war, especially under the tight-lipped Obama administration. "The only time I'm allowed to talk to senior staff or the nsc is for stories that make the administration look good," McClatchy's Landay said.

In other words, an experienced journalist

reputed to be a mouthpiece, and an experienced journalists known for bucking the Administration propaganda leading up to the Iraq War. Both in agreement that the Administration won't tell you anything unless it puts the Administration and its drone program in the best light.

Which is why I love this bit, which McKelvey puts right after a discussion about the clouded legality of the program.

A spokesman for the White House National Security Council, who spoke only on condition he not be named, rebuffed questions about why the administration refuses to speak with reporters on the record about the program. "You're going to have a lot of people on the outside, and they all love to talk," he said. "We can't do that." And, the official added, if outsiders are talking about the drone war, "that means they don't know very much."

This NSC spokesperson may or may not be Tommy Vietor, who is, after all, the NSC spokesperson.

For McKelvey, this Tommy Vietor sound-alike basically claims he cannot comment. Both Ignatius (who ought to know) and Landay make it clear they would have comment if there were good news to share.

Which further adds to the evidence that where they refuse to give us evidence—as they have with Anwar al-Awlaki's assassination—it's because they have no good news to give.