

THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS AS PROPAGANDA



Go read JimWhite's diary about the military's complaints that the Taliban are using a video of a captured American soldier as propaganda.

They're exploiting the soldier for their own propaganda.

[snip]

The Taliban are using it as a propaganda tool.

Then read this passage from George Tenet's book, co-written with Bill Harlow:

By the next morning, Sunday, March 2, US media outlets were carrying news of the [KSM] capture as well. Some of the stories described the worldly KSM as an al-Qa'ida James Bond. To illustrate the point, they showed photos of him with a full beard wearing what were supposedly his traditional robes. It didn't take long for Marty to phone me and relay his disgust at some of the coverage.

[snip]

"Boss," he said, "this ain't right. The media are making this bum look like a hero. That ain't right. You should see the way this bird looked when we took him down. I want to show the world what terrorists look like!"

Turns out, our officers on the scene in Rawalpindi had snapped and sent back some digital photos of KSM just after his capture, so I suggested that Marty call the Agency spokesman, Bill Harlow,

and work something out. Within an hour, Harlow was in CTC looking over a selection of photos that made KSM look nothing like James Bond. Together they picked out the most evocative photo. Then Harlow, armed with a digital copy, called up a reporter at the Associated Press and told him, "I'm about to make your day." Asking only that the AP not reveal where they got the picture, he released the image of a stunned, disheveled, scroungy KSM wearing a ratty T-shirt. The photo became one of the iconic images of the war on terrorism. If we could have copyrighted it, we might have funded CTC for a year on the profits. Foreign intelligence services later told us that the single best thing we ever did was release that photo. It sent a message more eloquently than ten thousand words ever could that the life of a terrorist on the run is anything but glamorous.

I hope to hell that soldier comes home safely and I'm sorry the Taliban used his image for propaganda purposes.

But until we stop doing the same—and appropriately deal with those, like Tenet and Harlow, who have bragged of using detainee photos as propaganda (yes, I know they'll claim he was not entitled to Geneva Convention treatment but there was a written policy allowing use of photos at the time), we don't have the moral standing to complain.

This is why we can't just look forward but must fully investigate the past.