

BOWE BERGDAHL AND JOKE LINE

Just one follow-up to my "Omigoddidjokelinereallygothere" post from yesterday.

Joke Line, in his screed against Glenn Greenwald, argued that Glenn cares not a whit for national security.

During that time, I have never seen him write a positive sentence about the US military, which has transformed itself dramatically for the better since Rumsfeld's departure (indeed, he ridiculed me when I reported that the situation in Anbar Province was turning around in 2007). I have never seen him acknowledge that the work of the clandestine service-performed disgracefully by the CIA during the early Bush years-is an absolute necessity in a world where terrorists have the capability to attack us at any time, in almost any place. Nor have I seen [him] acknowledge that such a threat exists, nor make a single positive suggestion about how to confront that threat in ways that might conform to his views. Therefore, I have seen no evidence that he cares one whit about the national security of the United States. It is not hyperbole, it is a fact.

You see, the thing that bugs Joke Line is that (he says) Glenn is a "a civil liberties absolutist" and doesn't talk about the transformation of the US military, the importance of the clandestine services, or the terrorist threat.

But see what he doesn't say?

He doesn't mention the men and women serving in the military. At least as he has framed his attack, Glenn's failure is that he hasn't mentioned the abstract military-as-machine and the terrorist-threat-as-bogeyman. But not that he hasn't mentioned the men and women risking their lives to run that military-as-machine against the terrorist-threat-as-bogeyman.

Now, I don't mean to adopt Joke Line's rhetorical attack—attacking Glenn for things he hasn't said. I trust that Joke Line cares about the troops, regardless of how he has framed his attack on Glenn.

But I did want to point out something missing from the binary he set up: civil liberties absolutist versus national security realist.

Bowe Bergdahl.

Bowe Bergdahl and all the other men and women who have or might be taken captive by our enemies in the war Joke Line cares so much about. Bergdahl, who, last anyone checked on August 10, is still in Taliban custody. And who may bear the brunt of the Bush Administration's (and the Village's) disdain for principles all those civil liberties absolutists hold dear: that we should treat people in custody as we would want our own servicemen and women to be treated.

I don't know whether Joke Line has forgotten or simply doesn't care (though I assume it's just a matter of emphasis), but there are a number of reasons to be absolutists about torture: torture is ineffective, torture is against the law, torture turns us into monsters.

But most importantly, if we torture, our enemies will be more likely to torture.

Contrary to what Joke Line suggests, being an absolutist against torture is not inherently opposed to caring about national security. Rather, it's a matter of what is really important to protecting our national security.