

WHO WILL THE GOVERNMENT SCAPEGOAT NOW ON THE WUHAYSHI LEAK?

Yesterday, I noted that McClatchy, the first outlet to publish (though probably not the first outlet to get the leak) the news that the big terror alert stems from an intercepted communication between Ayman al-Zawahiri and Nasir al-Wuhayshi, clearly labeled its source as a Yemeni official.

HuffPo not only confirmed this, but got McClatchy's editor James Asher to provide a little lesson in journalism.

Our story was based on reporting in Yemen and we did not contact the administration to ask permission to use the information. In fact, our reporter tells me that the intercept was pretty much common knowledge in Yemen. On your larger question about the administration's request, I'm not surprised. It is not unusual for CNN or the NYT to agree not to publish something because the White House asked them. And frankly, our Democracy isn't well served when journalists agree to censor their work.

As I've told our readers in the past: McClatchy journalists will report fairly and independently. We will not make deals with those in power, regardless of party or philosophy.

Now, predictably, some of the same people who generated the outrage over UndieBomb 2.0 have squawked about the danger of this leak (which, if it is what has been described, must be damaging).

"I'm very worried about leaks to the media of classified information because it warns the enemy," Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., told Ward. "That'll be the last intercept of that kind, of means of communication that we intercept."

Added Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., "If we compromise our ability to find out what these guys are up to and stop them before they act, we'll pay a heavy price. They're not deterred by dying. They embrace dying. They just want to take me and you with 'em."

Frankly, McCain and Lindsey are right this time around. This feels like a politicized leak, and if the underlying intelligence was what the reports say, it may well badly damage our legitimate SIGINT efforts.

All that said, I confess I popped a little popcorn when I read this last night. Because it's clear the Yemenis weren't the only ones leaking like a sieve. Someone in the Administration (NYT's sources) It'll be hard for the Administration to target McClatchy given that they've already made clear where their source is (though I can't help to suspect McClatchy's sharp response to relates to the reported treatment of McClatchy freelancer Jon Stephenson). So who are they going to scapegoat this time?