

BRENNAN CALLS OUT THE PRESS FOR GIVING ISIS MORE CREDIT THAN THEY DESERVE

Both James Clapper and John Brennan appeared at the Aspen Security Forum this week (it was Brennan's first appearance, apparently). As I may lay out, Clapper was by far the more measured of the two. But this exchange, between Brennan and Dina Temple-Raston, deserves more attention. She notes that ISIS gets credit for attacks (she doesn't name any, but I'd point to the San Bernardino killing and the Orlando massacre) that seem incidentally motivated at the last minute by ISIS, but generally are motivated by other issues.

To his credit, Brennan blames the press for crediting ISIS with these attacks.

Temple-Raston: It seems that people get credit for being an ISIS adherent just by having a brief flirtation online with the group. And I wonder if by calling something an ISIS attack so readily, which we seem to do, whether or not we're giving ISIS more credit than it deserves.

Brennan: When you say "calling something an ISIS attack" that we're prone to do, you're talking about the media, right?

[Laughter, Brennan not exactly smiling, then later smiling]

Temple-Raston: No.

[More laughter]

Temple-Raston: I just wonder if you can't say that it's an opportunistic attack, as opposed to an ISIS attack.

But then Brennan goes on and notes that getting credit for such attacks is part of ISIS's strategy.

Brennan: Sometimes I think ISIL doesn't know themselves. I think most times they don't. If somebody has been encouraged and incited by ISIL, they have no idea if that was the real motivation. Even if somebody is found with literature in their apartment that might reflect ISIL's, you know, narrative, that doesn't mean that they carried it out for that. It may mean that they, you know, woke up that day and wanted to commit suicide and wanted to take others down with them. But, it is part of ISIL's strategy to have people that they can deploy, directly, that they can support directly, as well as to encourage and provide indirect direction and incitement to individuals. They will claim credit for a lot of things and they feel as though this is part of their brand.

Therein is the rub. If this is part of ISIS' strategy, then having the media – and FBI (or, in other countries, other security organizations) – give them credit for it only serves to play to their strength.

Both Brennan and Temple-Raston remained silent about FBI's role in this process, leaking details about affiliation with ISIS. But that – and the budget driving impulse that is a part of the motivation for it – is as much a part of the problem as the media's rush to label things ISIS.