

Diane Sawyer and ABC News pay tribute to remote control drone killings

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14 January 2010

American television news becomes more and more unwatchable, especially in its reports on the expanding wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. Perfectly coiffed, interchangeable news and anchor people repeat White House and Pentagon lies. “In-depth” reports provide nothing in the way of meaningful commentary or analysis. In general, everything is done to hide the truth from the American people.

Diane Sawyer, promoted to hosting ABC’s prime time evening news program a few weeks ago, and the rest of that network’s news personalities are in the forefront of the government’s disinformation campaign. It is worth noting that Sawyer, who began her television career doing the weather in Louisville, Kentucky, went to work for the Nixon administration in 1970 in the midst of the Vietnam War and stayed with the disgraced former president through his forced resignation, helping him write his memoirs.

On Tuesday night’s evening news, Sawyer and two colleagues, David Muir and Bill Weir, spent six or seven minutes extolling the merits of the US Air Force’s Predator drones and their deadly attacks in Afghanistan. The Predators, according to Pakistani government and media sources, murdered some 700 civilians in that country in 2009, but the CIA-US military program of killings by drone attack on that side of the border is “covert,” without the official sanction of the Islamabad regime. Thus, Sawyer and company had to be satisfied with covering the US military’s increased use of drones in Afghanistan.

According to a companion piece by Weir on its web

site, ABC News was “granted exclusive access to the ground control station at the California [Air Force] base, one of six in the country where the planes are flown.” In other words, the broadcast report was a component part of the military’s official propaganda effort, prepared and vetted with the collaboration of Pentagon officials.

Sawyer introduced the story from Kabul, alerting her viewers to “the war you do not see, the skyrocketing use of drones.” She went on to explain in Orwellian fashion that the “potentially lethal” drones were “another new strategy against the rising tide of violence in this country.” Yesterday, Sawyer told her audience, “drones assisted in taking out 16 of the enemy.” She noted that airmen 8,000 miles from Afghanistan were pushing the buttons, sending 500-pound bombs or Hellfire missiles hurtling to the ground.

The Obama administration has overseen a sharp increase in the drone program, notes ABC, to “400 hours a day, a 300 percent increase.” From 100 three years ago, the number of drones in use has jumped to 1,200.

Muir writes on the ABC web site: “On this one California base alone, over the last six months, not one hour has gone by when Air Force pilots haven’t been watching over Afghanistan through the eyes of at least one Predator drone. The technology has been such a game-changer that over the next year, the Air Force will now train more drone pilots than fighter and bomber pilots combined.”

Sawyer proudly tells us that the drone is a “high-tech symbol of American might.” About one minute of the segment is devoted to the moral issues involved in bombing people from halfway around the world. It

raises, the ABC anchorwoman notes, “new questions about what’s right and wrong,” before she quickly passes on to the “exclusive” footage shot in the California control center.

Here, Muir explains, “Each drone is controlled by a two-man team, seated in front of a video screen clutching a joystick. On the screens, the men see live video from the drones in Afghanistan, picking out armed enemies on the ground who have no idea they’re being watched. The pilot can launch a missile simply by pulling a trigger.

“The drones send back images in the blink of an eye—it takes just 1.7 seconds for the imagery to travel through 12 time zones. The video travels from the drone to a satellite and then down to a classified location in Europe. From there, it flows through a fiber optic nerve across the Atlantic Ocean to reach the California base. But it’s not finished—the signal then branches out to other bases, the Pentagon, and right back to the ground commander in Afghanistan.”

He goes on: “We watched as a pilot monitored insurgents planting an IED [improvised explosive device] in northern Afghanistan. It made a good target, and with the punch of a button, a Hellfire missile launched, taking the insurgents out.”

As the WSWS has noted on more than one occasion in recent years, US government officials and media personalities have had no difficulty in adopting the lingo of the Mafia.

ABC’s Weir reports on efforts by the American military team on the ground to determine whether a given group of Afghans seems an appropriate target to be wiped out. In the particular instance highlighted in Tuesday’s report, the drone spots a number of individuals carrying heavy objects. Weir, somewhat disappointed that the suspicious Afghans are not immediately blown to bits, comments on the military’s remarkable “restraint.” They turn out to be four boys and a girl collecting firewood. They were fortunate on this occasion. How many have not been?

As a final comment, Weir declares, “Even if he could have proven it [the potential slaughter of the children] was an honest mistake, the captain tells me that killing these five children would have undone months of work winning over local elders, and that has become the key battle in this war.”

What can one say? This is the moral state of the

American media: the murder of poverty-stricken children by missiles or bombs might, after all, be no more than an “honest mistake” (and therefore pardonable), but, on the downside, it could prove an inconvenience to US war aims (and therefore should be avoided, if possible).

Bill Weir’s résumé indicates that he is well suited to deal with life-and-death questions in Central Asia. A graduate of Pepperdine University in Malibu, California (where a typical student, according to one commentator, “tends to be devoutly Christian, right-wing, Republican,” and wealthy), Weir began his career as a weekend sportscaster at a radio station in Austin, Minnesota. He worked his way up to sports anchor at KABC-TV in Los Angeles from 1998 to 2002, where he hosted a weekly program that aired after Monday Night Football. He has also written and developed three television pilots for the USA and FX networks.

On the ABC web site, Muir concludes that “the drone pilots know their work is important. Every minute in the cockpit helps defend their military colleagues on the battlefield and improve their chances of getting home alive.”

The entire “news report” Tuesday was nothing more nor less than a defense of neo-colonial warfare and mass murder by well-paid hirelings of the American establishment.



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