

Another 60 Minutes Puff Piece - An Ad for the FBI without Critical Scrutiny or Questioning

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Based on its legacy, the CBS show 60 Minutes is still sometimes thought of as the remaining place in TV news where tough investigative journalism has a home. But lately, they've been doing something else.

The most recent example came last night ([10/5/14](#)), when correspondent Scott Pelley sat down with FBI director James Comey—a powerful government official who, Pelley tells viewers right off the bat, they probably don't know:

Do you know the name of the director of the FBI? Probably not. James Comey has been America's top cop for just one year, and he hasn't done a major television interview until tonight.

What follows was essentially an ad for the FBI, absent any critical scrutiny or questioning. Pelley and Comey talk about the threat of cybercrime ("Sounds like cybercrime is a long way from Bonnie and Clyde for the FBI," as Pelley puts it) and the various threats posed by the ISIS group in Syria and Iraq. We learn that Comey doesn't like the term "lone wolf" to refer to potential homegrown terrorist threats—"I'd prefer lone rat."

In return for this kid-glove approach, CBS got access to places TV cameras don't often get to go, like the training center for the agency's Hostage Rescue Team, which, Pelley explains, "has joined US Special Operations Forces for hundreds of missions in Iraq and Afghanistan."

This is part of a shift at the FBI, Pelley tells viewers: "The new emphasis, these days, is to bring terrorists to court."

If the point was for the FBI to appear in command and on top of the threats to Americans, then CBS did what it set out to do. And the report looked very similar to a 2013 profile of an outgoing CIA official: "Mike Morell was deputy director of the CIA and gave us the only television interview he's ever done," said CBS correspondent John Miller ([10/27/13](#))—who was, by the way, previously the assistant public affairs director at the FBI (FAIR Blog, [10/29/13](#)).

Miller was also the 60 Minutes correspondent who brought us a fawning tribute to the NSA, heavy on the this-has-never-been-seen-on-TV-before details and light on critical questioning of a highly controversial government agency (FAIR Action Alert, [12/16/13](#)).

As with the NSA, there are plenty of tough questions to ask the FBI, on topics ranging from

Patriot Act abuses to attacks on whistleblowers and journalists. See the ACLU's "[The Ten Most Disturbing Things You Should Know About the FBI Since 9/11](#)" for a helpful list of subjects CBS could have asked about.

Former CBS correspondent John Miller has returned to government; he's currently heading the New York Police Department's intelligence division. But maybe 60 Minutes is trying to show viewers—and, more importantly, massive government agencies—that it can still produce softball profiles of powerful government figures without him.

At the close of the segment, Scott Pelley tells viewers:

Our conversation with FBI Director James Comey continues here next week, when we ask whether the FBI is snooping on average Americans.

I think we already know the answer to that one.

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