

RELEASE IN PART
B5,B6

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2011 1:07 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: another Wiki cables story -- the Seychelles and US Reaper drones

From: Hammer, Michael A
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2011 12:53 PM
To: Carson, Johnnie; Wharton, David B; Mills, Cheryl D; Kennedy, Patrick F; Mull, Stephen D; Blake, Robert O; Benjamin, Daniel S
Cc: Smith, Dana S; Zeya, Uzra S; Naranjo, Brian R
Subject: Re: another Wiki cables story -- the Seychelles and US Reaper drones

Team - Am alerting DoD and NSS.

From: Craig M Whitlock [,
Sent: Sunday, September 18, 2011 09:59 PM
To: Hammer, Michael A
Subject: re: another cables story -- the Seychelles and US Reaper drones

Dear Mike,

I'm working on another national-security story involving some State Department cables, and was hoping you could help, or point me in the right direction.

This story will report that the U.S. military (specifically, the U.S. Africa Command and the Navy) have been deploying MQ-9 Reaper drones on secret counter-terrorism missions over Somalia from a base in the Republic of the Seychelles.

The U.S. Africa Command had announced publicly in September 2009 that it was basing some Reaper drones in the Seychelles as part of an anti-piracy mission. But several confidential State Department cables make clear that the drones were also being used to perform counter-terrorism missions over the Horn of Africa and Somalia, and that U.S. officials asked the president of the Seychelles to keep it secret.

Given that Wikileaks recently posted the remainder of its database of State Department cables to its publicly accessible website, my editors have determined that it's no longer necessary for the Post to provide the State Department with hard copies of the cables we are planning to cite in advance -- as we have done in the past.

Naturally, however, The Post would still like to get reaction or comment from the State Department for the story. In the interest of transparency, the primary cables we plan to cite or publish are as follows:

09PORTLOUIS218
 09PORTLOUIS271
 09PORTLOUIS292
 09PORTLOUIS397

(As you may know, the U.S. government does not have an embassy in the Seychelles; the nearest U.S. diplomats are based in Port Louis, Mauritius)

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I have already been in touch with the U.S. Africa Command and the Navy to ask questions about operational details of the Reaper drone deployments to the Seychelles.

But I did have some specific questions for the State Department that I was hoping you could assist with:

1) The cables state that a primary reason for basing the Reaper drones in the Seychelles was so they could conduct counter-terrorism missions over Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Yet U.S. diplomats asked Seychelles President Jean Michel and other Seychellois officials to keep this aspect of the program "discreet" or a secret. Why did the State Department insist on the need for confidentiality? Was the publicly advertised anti-piracy mission a ruse or a cover story?

2) One cable (09PORTLOUIS292) indicates that one purpose for the drone flights over Somalia was to supply force protection to AMISOM (African Union peacekeepers) forces in Somalia, but that this particular mission was not disclosed to President Michel because he did not ask about it.

Did the State Department or other U.S. officials subsequently inform the Seychellois government that the drones were being used to supply force protection to AMISOM troops?

3) Although U.S. officials stated publicly in 2009 that the Reaper drones were unarmed, the cables make clear that the U.S. government was contemplating arming the UAVs. In fact, two cables reveal that U.S. diplomats told President Michel that they would notify him in advance if they decided to go ahead and arm the Reapers with missiles.

Did U.S. diplomats or other U.S. officials subsequently notify President Michel that UAVs based in the Seychelles would be armed? If so, when?

We have not fixed a publication date for this article yet, but it is possible that we will publish as soon as Wednesday.

Thanks again for your help and patience with these queries.

All the best,

Craig

Craig Whitlock
staff writer
The Washington Post



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