

16 WORDS: THE NEW YORK TIMES HAS LEARNED THAT THE US RECENTLY SOUGHT A DRONE BASE IN NIGER

Ten years ago today, George Bush would lay the ground work for a war with these 16 words.

The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa

Those words were based on a dubious claim that Iraq had tried to purchase yellowcake from Niger.

Today, the NYT reports that the US wants a drone base in northwest Africa, probably Niger.

The United States military command in Africa is preparing plans to establish a drone base in northwest Africa to increase unarmed surveillance missions on the local affiliate of Al Qaeda and other Islamist extremist groups that American and other Western officials say pose a growing menace to the region.

For now, officials say they envision flying only unarmed surveillance drones from the base, though they have not ruled out conducting missile strikes at some point if the threat worsens.

If the base is approved, the most likely location for it would be in Niger, a largely desert nation on the eastern border of Mali, where French and Malian troops are now battling Qaeda-backed fighters who control the northern part of that country.

As Micah Zenko just noted on Twitter, this base would provide access to conduct drone strikes all over Northern Africa.

And even as the Administration rolls out another front for its drone war, it refuses (or at least refused, as of a few weeks ago) to tell Congress who it is targeting based on what authorization. As Jack Goldsmith has pointed out, conducting drone strikes under such circumstances is not as legally sound as the Administration's use of drones to strike core al Qaeda targets.

Ten years ago today, Bush's 16 words launched us towards an illegal war in Iraq. On this anniversary, we need to ask what kind of illegal wars a base in Niger would lead to.