

DID THE ADMINISTRATION'S OWN PROPENSITY FOR LEAKS CRASH THE SEAL'S BLACKHAWK?

The AP has an astoundingly detailed description of the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound. It describes the kinds of aircraft used, the minutes spent completing each part of the task, and even explained that the Geronimo name just served to indicate that the SEALs had reached stage "G" of the mission.

It also includes two details that, when considered together, suggests the troubling possibility that potential Administration leaks put the operation in danger.

First, the story explains that the mission was launched the night it was because too many people had been briefed on it and people were worried about leaks.

The decision to launch on that particular moonless night in May came largely because too many American officials had been briefed on the plan. U.S. officials feared if it leaked to the press, bin Laden would disappear for another decade.

That is, the Administration launched the mission on the night they did not because it presented optimal conditions, but because they (or CIA or DOD) worried that someone would actually leak advance details to the press of one of the most sensitive missions of the last decade. (I can't remember who it was, but I have this vague memory of one reporter describing the raid after Obama's announcement of it referencing a discussion of it that had taken place the previous morning, so before it happened. I

thought at the time that it'd be weird for the Administration to do an advance briefing on this operation. If my memory is right on this count, it means advance news of the operation **did** leak to the press.)

Later in the article, the AP provides a description of why one of the two Black Hawks went down (and how that made them deviate from their planned stealth approach on the compound). The key factor, the AP notes, was the unexpectedly hot temperature, which thinned the air and made the chopper more difficult to maneuver.

The Black Hawks were specially engineered to muffle the tail rotor and engine sound, two officials said. The added weight of the stealth technology meant cargo was calculated to the ounce, with weather factored in. The night of the mission, it was hotter than expected.

[snip]

The plan unraveled as the first helicopter tried to hover over the compound. The Black Hawk skittered around uncontrollably in the heat-thinned air, forcing the pilot to land. As he did, the tail and rotor got caught on one of the compound's 12-foot walls. The pilot quickly buried the aircraft's nose in the dirt to keep it from tipping over, and the SEALs clambered out into an outer courtyard.

Now, it may be there's no connection between the Administration's worry about leaks and the decision to launch the mission even though temperatures put the helicopters at risk. It may be that SEALs measure cargo down to the ounce but don't bother to schedule around volatile spring weather.

But these two details make one thing clear: the mission was launched on a less than optimal

night. And it was launched when it was because the Administration worried about impending leaks.

And even if there's **not** a connection between the too-hot night and the imperative to launch when they did to pre-empt any leaks, the implication remains. The Administration suspected someone within the too-large but presumably very limited circle of people briefed on this raid either **had already leaked** or **would** leak this information to the press. The Administration believed someone in that tight circle might compromise operational security of a tremendously sensitive and dangerous mission.

Why isn't that person—rather than Thomas Drake—awaiting trial?