

AND THE DRONES START PATROLLING IRAQ, AGAIN

Back when I went on a tear about how drones undermine nation-states (both ours and those countries we use them in) I predicted we'd be using drones in Iraq again.

Iraq: While plenty of America's wars have been dubiously legitimate, Iraq certainly is at the top of that list. We trumped up a case against a sovereign nation-state (one with manufactured legitimacy internally, but no less than many of our allies in the region). In what may be the last traditional nation-state war we fight, we managed to (at least thus far and only barely) avoid breaking the country up into three or more parts and establish another leader with questionable legitimacy. In most of that, drones weren't key. But I'm betting that they will be going forward as a threat to Nuri al-Maliki that if he doesn't invite our troops to stay longer, we will feel free to use drones in his country. That's just a guess, mind you, but the evolution of our drone power (and the influence Iran has in Iraq) surely has a bearing on whether and how Iraq fully reasserts its sovereignty by kicking our troops out.

Sure enough, it's happening and Iraqis are worried about what it says about their sovereignty.

A month after the last American troops left Iraq, the State Department is operating a small fleet of surveillance drones here to help protect the United States Embassy and consulates, as well as American personnel. Some senior Iraqi

officials expressed outrage at the program, saying the unarmed aircraft are an affront to Iraqi sovereignty.

The program was described by the department's diplomatic security branch in a little-noticed section of its most recent **annual report** and outlined in broad terms in a **two-page online prospectus** for companies that might bid on a contract to manage the program. It foreshadows a possible expansion of unmanned drone operations into the diplomatic arm of the American government; until now they have been mainly the province of the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency.

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A senior American official said that negotiations were under way to obtain authorization for the current drone operations, but Ali al-Mosawi, a top adviser to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki; Iraq's national security adviser, Falih al-Fayadh; and the acting minister of interior, Adnan al-Asadi, all said in interviews that they had not been consulted by the Americans.

Mr. Asadi said that he opposed the drone program: "Our sky is our sky, not the U.S.A.'s sky."

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The State Department confirmed the existence of the program, calling the devices unmanned aerial vehicles, but it declined to provide details. "The department does have a U.A.V. program," it said in a statement without referring specifically to Iraq. "The U.A.V.'s being utilized by the State Department are not armed, nor are they capable of being armed."

Though I gotta hand it to this drone-happy Administration. I didn't predict they'd have the tone-deafness of running these drones through the Department of State.

It says "State" right there in the name. How can you pretend to be conducting diplomacy between states when you insist on having your own robot air force (albeit unarmed) flying over theirs?