

IS IT THE CIA-OR THE SAUDIS-WHO WANT SIGNATURE STRIKES IN YEMEN?

This is, IMO, the most telling line in this entire article on the CIA's request to use the signature strikes in Yemen that proved so problematic in Pakistan:

The JSOC has broader authority than the CIA to pursue militants in Yemen and is not seeking permission to use signature strikes, U.S. officials said.

After all, in Pakistan, where only the CIA flies drones, David Petraeus has sharply limited the use of signature strikes. But in Yemen, where both JSOC and CIA fly drones (and operate on the ground), JSOC sees no need but Petraeus does.

Consider what that means in conjunction with this:

The CIA, the National Security Agency and other spy services have deployed more officers and resources to Yemen over the past several years to augment counterterrorism operations that were previously handled almost exclusively by the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command.

The CIA began flying armed drones over Yemen last year after opening a secret base on the Arabian Peninsula. The agency also has worked with the Saudi and Yemeni intelligence services to build networks of informants – much the way it did in Pakistan before ramping up drone strikes there.

That is, these signature strikes would be operating from a base in Saudi Arabia (or is it

in Oman), with informants developed, in significant part, by the Saudis (ya think)? And this authority, if granted, would permit the killing of people whose identities the CIA did not know.

The Saudis have, in the past, asked for Predator drones specifically so they could use them to attack the Houthi rebels in Yemen. They have blamed the Houthis and other unrest in Yemen on Iran, their rival for hegemony in the Middle East. At least according to what the Yemenis claimed to their Parliament, Saudi intelligence was involved in the disastrous strike on al-Majalah.

Now maybe this crazed plan wasn't dreamed up by the Saudis.

But it sure sounds like a backdoor way for the Saudis to access control over drones and their targets in Yemen, without the CIA double-checking their work.

Mind you, the article suggests that even former CIA Saudi station chief John Brennan is likely to oppose this idea.

The CIA might be able to replicate that success in Yemen, the former intelligence official said. But he expressed skepticism that White House officials, including counterterrorism adviser John O. Brennan, would approve the CIA's Yemen request.

So maybe I'm completely wrong that this is a way to give the Saudis more control.

Still. There are a lot of other reasons this is a terrible idea, many of them readily apparent just from the many contradictions in this piece. But the degree to which it outsources more control of our already counterproductive drone program to the Saudis is certainly one big reason, IMO, why it's a terrible idea.

Update: Since I'm talking about Saudi Arabia's interests in Yemen, I ought to point out this

news.

On March 28, a Saudi diplomat named Abdullah al Khalidi was kidnapped by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the port city of Aden, Yemen. AQAP's gunmen captured al Khalidi, who served as Saudi Arabia's deputy consul in Aden, as he was getting into his car outside of his residence.

Sometime thereafter the Saudi embassy in Sanaa received a call from an ex-Guantanamo detainee named Mishhaal Mohammed Rasheed al Shadoukhi. According to Saudi government sources cited by *Asharq Al Awsat*, al Shadoukhi assured the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, Ali Al Hamdan, that al Khalidi was "fine and in good health."

Al Shadoukhi issued several demands, including the "release of all female prisoners" who are in Saudi custody and connected to al Qaeda, the release of various other detainees held by Saudi authorities, and a ransom payment that is to be negotiated.

Al Shadoukhi also told the ambassador that the Saudis could send an emissary to Jaar, a southern Yemeni town controlled by al Qaeda and its allies, if they want to discuss al Khalidi's "case" with his kidnappers further.

Al Shadoukhi is one of the many Saudis who went through "deradicalization"—a process which seems to have resulted in some double agents and some people aware that the Saudis were recruiting double agents.