

WHO ELSE CAN YOU TARGET WITH PREDATOR DRONES? DRUG CARTELS AND PIRATES?

Noah Shachtman focuses on one troubling part of this long article on the Obama Administration's fondness for Predator drones: the suggestion that the Administration prefers killing alleged terrorists to capturing them, since we don't have a good place to hold them.

But there's another aspect I find just as troubling: the other uses for Predator drones considered by the Bush and Obama Administrations.

The Bush Administration apparently considered using them with drug cartels in Mexico.

A former U.S. intelligence official said there were discussions late in the Bush administration about the possibility of using armed drones to help Mexican fight narco-traffickers. But the idea of "shooting missiles on the outskirts of Mexico City" ran into opposition, he said.

And it appears someone within the current Administration thinks they'd make good tools against Somali pirates.

Back in Washington, the technology is considered such a success that the U.S. military has been positioning Reaper drones at a base in the Horn of Africa.

The aircraft can be used against militants in Yemen and Somalia, and even potentially against pirates who attack commercial ships traversing the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, officials

said.

“Everyone has fallen in love with them,”
a former U.S. intelligence official said
of the drone strikes.

Aside from the really horrifying way in which Predator drones appear to be treated like a nifty all-purpose tool, it suggests the legal analysis on the use of Predator drones is backwards. Any use with either drug cartels or pirates would be so far outside the realm of self-defense in the context of a war to be nonsensical in the argument—at least—that Harold Koh has given. But what led the Bush Administration to decide not to use drones with drug cartels, it appears, was an issue of pragmatism—the impracticality of using drones outside of Mexico City (or, more likely, just south of the American border), rather than any issue of law or proportionality.

In other words, it appears that Bush had and now Obama has a hammer. And they’re finding nails that are getting further and further from counterterrorism and closer to raw power, anywhere in the world.