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US Firms Plan Somali Operations

IslamOnline.net & Newspapers

CAIRO — US security firms have designed plans to run covert military operations in support of Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf's interim government against the influential Islamic Courts with CIA and United Nations officials being kept posted on the schemes, a British newspaper revealed on Sunday, September 10.



The US security firm officials had a "successful" meeting with Yusuf at his Nairobi residence.

Yusuf has had a "successful" meeting with representatives of the Virginia-based US military firm Select Armor at his private hotel in the Kenyan capital Nairobi and appointed his chief of presidential protocol as a go-between, *The Observer* reported, citing a string of leaked confidential e-mails dated June between US private security firms.

In an email dated Friday, 16 June, Select Armor President and CEO Michele Ballarin said she has been given "carte blanche" to use three bases in Somalia "and the air access to reach them."

According to the highly respected newsletter Africa Confidential, which originally published extracts of the emails last week, Select Armor started its operation planning in Kampala, Uganda.

Ballarin noted that there were "a number of Brit security firms" that were also looking to get involved.

The 16 June mail was sent to a number of individuals including Chris Farina of the Florida-based military company ATS Worldwide.

In one reply, Farina warned: "A forced entry operation [into Mogadishu] at this point without the addition of follow-on forces who can capitalize on the momentum/initiative of the initial op will result in a replay of Dien Bien Phu."

He was referring to the 1953 defeat of French colonial forces in Dien Bien Phu, a small town in northwestern Vietnam.

The powerful Islamic Courts and the largely powerless interim government signed a peace accord in Khartoum on Monday, September 4, calling for the formation of a unified national army and police force.

The two sides had met in Khartoum in June for their first direct talks and agreed to recognize each other and to observe a ceasefire.

The Islamic Courts rose to power by capturing Mogadishu in June from the US-backed Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT) warlords who had ruled the capital since the overthrow of Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991.

CIA, UN informed

In the June 16 mail, Ballarin cited a "closed-door meeting" with a senior UN figure over the undercover operations.

The Select Armor CEO also indicated that the CIA has been kept informed of the plans.

"My contact whom we discussed from the agency side requested an in-person meeting with me. I arrived in New York at 2340 last night and was driven to Virginia - arriving at 0200 today," she wrote.

The CIA is headquartered in the town of McLean, Virginia.

Another email discussing funding of any operation sent from Farina to Ballarin states: "We may have to re-focus our efforts in the US among the DOS [State Department] and DOD [Defense Department] to bring any forward movement to this effort."

Although Washington has not explicitly confirmed support for the ARPCT, US officials have said the defeated Somali warlords.

US government officials and experts have said that secret CIA funding for the ARPCT has backfired, empowering the same groups the Bush administration has sought to marginalize.

Washington has shied away from direct involvement in Somalia since its 1994 humiliating exit.

American troops hastily left Somalia after a catastrophic intervention in the country left 18 American soldiers killed.

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