

Another criminal US missile strike inside Pakistan

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A third US missile strike in less than a week inside Pakistan again underscores the danger that the escalating war in Afghanistan will spread into its neighbour. At least 20 people died on Monday when up to five missiles fired from US unmanned Predator drones hit a madrassa or religious school and a compound in North Waziristan—part of Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along with border with Afghanistan.

The strike on the village of Daande Darpkhel targetted Jalaluddin Haqqani, who established the school and backed the Taliban following the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. His son Sirajuddin is now reportedly leading the Haqqani militia and has been accused by the US military of being behind a series of assaults inside Afghanistan, including an attempt on the life of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and a suicide bomb attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul.

Pakistani intelligence officials told the Associated Press yesterday that four foreign militants were among those killed but provided no evidence. The dead included Jalaluddin Haqqani’s wife and sister, several other women and at least four children. Some 15 to 20 people were wounded, mostly women and children, and were taken to the hospital in nearby Miram Shah. Another of Jalaluddin Haqqani’s sons, Badruddin, told the Pakistani media that neither his father nor Sirajuddin were in the compound at the time.

The religious school known as “Madrassa Mumba-i-Uloom” was built in the 1980s when Haqqani was involved in the Mujaheddin, the CIA-backed jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. According to the *Washington Post*, Haqqani received millions of dollars in funding from the US and Saudi Arabia, and personally trained thousands of religious

zealots to join the war in Afghanistan.

The school, however, was closed after being raided by the Pakistani military at least three times over the past several years. An article on the *Asia Times* web site today described the raid on the Haqqanis as “perplexing,” noting that the father and son were “known by people in the area to have left the tribal region as they were on the US radar”.

The targetting of the Haqqani compound was calculated to send a message to new elected Pakistani President Asif Al Zardari that the US would not tolerate any let up in the military crackdown on Islamist militants in the FATA region. Washington has directly accused Pakistani military intelligence—the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)—of maintaining links with various pro-Taliban militias, including Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son.

The missile strike itself was an act of sheer thuggery, designed to intimidate and terrorise the local population, regardless of whether it was successful in killing the Haqqanis. Two other missile strikes took place last Thursday and Friday in North Waziristan, killing at least four and five people respectively. In the raid on Friday, at least three children died when a missile destroyed a house in the village of Goorweck Baipali.

The missile attacks follow the first confirmed ground assault by US troops inside Pakistani territory last Wednesday. Helicopter-borne Special Forces commandos landed in the village of Jalal Khei in South Waziristan in the early hours of the morning and attacked three compounds. At least 20 people, including women and children, died in the attack, which provoked anger not only among local tribes but across Pakistan.

The US attacks signal a marked escalation of

operations inside Pakistan. As if to underscore the point, US President Bush told a gathering at the US National Defence University yesterday that parts of Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan were “all theatres in the same overall struggle”. He reiterated the US demand that the Pakistan government suppress Islamist groups, declaring: “Defeating these terrorist and extremists is also Pakistan’s responsibility because every nation has an obligation to govern its own territory and make certain that it does not become a safe haven for terror.”

The intensification of US strikes inside Pakistan threatens to further destabilise the country. Pakistani President Zardari has pledged his full support for the bogus “war against terrorism” but confronts growing demands for action to prevent US attacks. Last week, the Pakistani parliament passed a resolution condemning the US raid in South Waziristan and warning of “retaliation with full force”. The overwhelming majority of the Pakistani population is opposed to the US occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq.

On Saturday, NATO military supplies being transported through Pakistan to Afghanistan were held up for several hours. Despite later official denials, Defence Minister Ahmed Mukhtar told the press that the halt had been in response to US attacks on Pakistani territory. Whether deliberate or not, the delay underscores the dependence of the US and NATO military in landlocked Afghanistan on supply lines through Pakistan. The only existing alternative route is via air through Russia and Central Asia, which is currently restricted to non-lethal supplies and reliant on Washington’s increasingly fraught relations with Moscow.

France issued a statement yesterday warning that US strikes were generating hostility inside Pakistan and undermining NATO operations inside Afghanistan. Foreign ministry spokesman Eric Chevallier told the press: “Not only are these creating human tragedies but also situations that have counterproductive effects on the political dynamics that we would like to see, and that means a partnership between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the international community.”

Writing on the *Asia Times* web site today, analyst Gareth Porter pointed out that the Bush administration had ignored warnings last month by the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) that military operations inside Pakistan carried a high risk of destabilising the

government and the military. Former defence intelligence officer Patrick Lang said the US intelligence community had issued “a pretty clear warning” against last week’s Special Forces raid. “They said, in effect, if you want to see the Pakistani government collapse, go right ahead,” he explained.

Another unnamed source said that the White House was warned that if US ground operations continued over a longer period of time, the NIC believed they could threaten the unity of the Pakistani army. A large proportion of the officers serving in the FATA region are Pashtun—the same ethnicity as the local tribes and those over the border inside Afghanistan. In previous battles between the Pakistani military and local tribes since 2001, scattered reports have appeared of Pashtun officers refusing to fight or threatening outright mutiny.

The Bush administration’s reckless determination to proceed despite the obvious political dangers highlights the desperate situation confronting the US inside Afghanistan, where American and NATO casualties are continuing to rise amid an escalating anti-occupation insurgency and widespread local opposition to the continued presence of foreign troops.



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