

Obama's surge: killing spree on both sides of AfPak border

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CIA drone missile attacks claimed the lives of 123 civilians last month alone in Pakistan, it was reported this week. Meanwhile, on the other side of the border, US Special Forces have launched an assassination campaign against alleged leaders of Afghanistan's Taliban movement in preparation for an imminent military offensive.

These killings are the product of the military "surge" ordered by the Obama administration, which is increasing the US troop deployment in the country by another 30,000. With other NATO countries providing between 5,000 and 10,000 additional soldiers, the occupation force in Afghanistan is set to swell to 150,000 by the fall of this year.

In Pakistan, the illegal US campaign of targeted assassinations has been joined with repeated Pakistani military offensives, instigated by Washington, that have claimed thousands of lives and displaced over a million people in the country's northwestern tribal areas.

Citing figures compiled by Pakistan's Interior Ministry, the Karachi-based daily the *News International* reported Monday that "Afghanistan-based US predators carried out a record number of 12 deadly missile strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan in January 2010, of which 10 went wrong and failed to hit their targets, killing 123 innocent Pakistanis."

The other two missiles, the newspapers said, claimed the lives of three alleged leaders of Al Qaeda on Washington's wanted list.

On Tuesday, the day after the report was published, there was a massive drone attack in the Degan area of North Waziristan, part of Pakistan's tribal areas near the Afghan border. According to initial reports, at least 17 people were killed and another 15 wounded. The death toll was expected to rise, however, as villagers dug through the rubble of demolished buildings.

This latest attack reportedly involved multiple drones and the firing of as many as 19 missiles.

The Pakistani media has attributed the upsurge in drone attacks to the CIA's search for revenge following the December 30 suicide bombing that killed seven CIA operatives and a top Jordanian intelligence agent. Those killed in the bombing at Forward Operating Base Chapman, near the Afghan border, included senior intelligence agents directly involved in picking targets for the Predator drone attacks.

The CIA believes that the attack, carried out by a Jordanian doctor whom the agency had believed was working for it in infiltrating Al Qaeda inside Pakistan, had been carried out with the aid of the Pakistani Taliban and its leader, Hakimullah Mehsud.

Last month the Taliban in Pakistan released a video in which the Jordanian, Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi, was shown explaining the planned attack while seated next to Mehsud.

The bombing at the CIA base was itself apparently motivated by revenge; in this case for the killing of Hakimullah Mehsud's brother, Baitullah Mehsud, in a US drone attack last August.

US and Pakistani intelligence have claimed that Hakimullah Mehsud, who was personally targeted in the attacks, has died from wounds suffered in one of the missile strikes carried out in mid-January. The attack, the seventh carried out last month, struck the village of Pasalkot in North Waziristan, killing 15 people.

Pakistani television media reported last weekend that Mehsud had died, but no government official has publicly confirmed this claim. Pakistani officials are reluctant to do so for fear of being identified with the US drone missile campaign, which is widely hated because of its large numbers of civilian victims and its gross violations of Pakistani sovereignty. Also, the

government has repeatedly claimed that Mehsud had been killed over the last several months, only to be proven wrong.

Taliban spokesmen insist that Mehsud is still alive.

In Afghanistan, US Special Forces troops are carrying out another campaign of targeted assassinations aimed against the Afghan resistance.

As the *Wall Street Journal* reported Tuesday, behind the public statements about waging a battle for the hearts and minds of the Afghan people by limiting civilian casualties and providing security and economic development, “the US is quietly escalating a more forcible campaign.”

“In recent months, small teams of Army commandos, Navy Seals and Central Intelligence Agency operatives have intensified the pace of what the military often calls ‘kill-capture missions’—hunting down just one or two insurgents at a time who are deemed too recalcitrant to be won over by any goodwill campaign,” the *Journal* continued.

Over the weekend, a US Special Forces unit returning from one of these “kill-capture” raids encountered an Afghan National Army outpost and attacked it, apparently believing it was battling Taliban fighters. After the unit called in air strikes, four Afghan soldiers were killed and several others wounded.

These raids are being carried out in advance of what is anticipated to be a major US offensive in the Marjah region of Helmand province, a Taliban stronghold where some 10,000 Marines have been deployed. The offensive is expected as early as the end of this week.

A report by the Agence France Presse news agency captured the mood of the Marines as they are about to be unleashed upon the district.

“Anger, frustration and a hunger for revenge are running high among US Marines as casualties mount on the frontline of the battle against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan,” AFP reported Tuesday.

“Commanders try to keep the men’s rage in check, aware that winning over an Afghan public wary of the foreign military presence and furious about mounting civilian casualties is as crucial as any battlefield success,” the report continued.

This rage is apparently a reaction to fighting against an indigenous resistance with the ability to inflict casualties on occupation forces and melt back into the local population.

These casualties have continued to mount, with four occupation troops killed on Monday. One of the soldiers, identified as an American, was killed in a roadside bombing in southern Afghanistan. Two other soldiers, whose nationality was not immediately reported, lost their lives in a firefight in the south of the country. And a Spanish soldier was killed, with six others wounded, when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb west of Kabul.

Appearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee Tuesday, Admiral Mike Mullen, chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sounded an ominous note as he argued for the \$33 billion in supplemental funding that the Obama administration has requested as the first installment on its Afghan surge.

Mullen said that 4,500 soldiers and Marines out of the 30,000-troop surge that Obama ordered last December are now in Afghanistan. He said 18,000 of them would be on the ground by late spring, and the full 30,000 by early fall.

“Right now, the Taliban believe they’re winning,” said Mullen, who had acknowledged that the US military had found “the situation to be more dire than previously understood,” with the Taliban possessing “a widespread paramilitary, shadow government and extra-judicial presence in a majority of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces.”

“The hardest work to achieve our regional aims remains ahead of us,” said the top US military commander. This “work” will involve a major escalation in the bloodletting on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in the coming weeks and months.



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