

CIA runs private army in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Tom Peters
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The new book *Obama's Wars*, by long-time *Washington Post* journalist Bob Woodward, publicly confirms that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has been running a private army of Afghan mercenaries since at least 2002. On September 22, the *Washington Post* reported that the 3,000-strong so-called Counterterrorism Pursuit Teams (CTPT) are "being used for surveillance, raids and combat operations in Afghanistan [and are] crucial to the United States' secret war in Pakistan, according to current and former U.S. officials".

Unnamed US "intelligence officials" told the *Post* that the CIA began to assemble the Afghan force "almost immediately" after the invasion of the country in 2001. According to the paper, the units are based in Kabul and Kandahar as well as Firebase Lilley and Forward Operating Base Orgun-E in Paktika province, which borders Pakistan. The Associated Press reported that "some have trained at CIA facilities in the United States".

The CTPT units operate in secrecy and are unaccountable to either the Afghan army or the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Some of their activities, however, were revealed in the 76,000 US military documents published in July by WikiLeaks. The *Post* report notes that "Army field reports suggest that the Afghan paramilitary forces can... be ruthless. On Oct. 23, 2007, military personnel at Orgun-E reported treating a 30-year-old Afghan man for the 'traumatic amputation of fingers' on his left hand. The man had been 'injured by Afghan OGA during a home breach', according to the report." Afghan OGA stands for "other government agency" and is "generally used as a reference to the CIA," according to the *Post*.

Such acts of brutality are carried out with impunity. Jonathan Horowitz, a human rights expert from the Open Society Institute, told the Associated Press (AP) on September 22 that given the group's secrecy,

"accountability for their abuses is nearly impossible for most Afghans. These forces don't fall under an Afghan military chain of command, and if a civilian is killed or maimed, the US can say it wasn't the fault of the US." The AP reported that Horowitz "added that Afghan civilians have regularly accused these paramilitary groups of physical abuse and theft of property during night raids".

In one incident in June 2009, described by the AP, the Kandahar-based group went "on a killing spree" after one of its members was arrested, killing Kandahar's police chief and nine other police officers. At the time, ISAF Lieutenant Commander Chris Hall told Agence France-Press that "there was no ISAF or coalition involvement at all" in the massacre.

In complete violation of Pakistan's sovereignty, the CIA's private army has been active in the country's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which border Afghanistan and are considered safe havens for Afghan fighters resisting the neo-colonial occupation. CNN reported on September 22 that a "former US counterterrorism official said a team would enter Pakistan to gather intelligence and to provide targeting information to help the CIA take out suspected terrorists with missiles from unmanned aircraft".

Predator drone strikes, most of them in the tribal agency of North Waziristan, have escalated in August and September. So far this month, more than 90 people have died in 20 drone strikes. According to Pakistan's *Daily Times*, "Many have struck in and around Dattakhel, which has a population of about 40,000 people." While those killed are invariably described as "terrorists" or "militants" by Pakistani and US intelligence officials, their identities are rarely confirmed and it is clear that hundreds of civilians have been killed.

Researcher Dr Zeeshanul Hasan Usmani, who runs the website *Pakistan Body Count*, told Pakistan's *Express Tribune* on September 27 that a total of 2,063 civilians have

been killed and 514 injured by drone strikes since they began in 2004. By his calculations, 57 civilians were killed for every single victim who was identified as a member of a specific terrorist organisation.

In an interview published on September 24 by *Cageprisoners.com*, Haider, a resident of Peshawar, described how his brother-in-law was killed in a drone attack while visiting friends in the North Waziristan town of Miranshah. A total of 31 people died when a missile hit a house during evening prayers. Haider said: “The civilians in all these regions are extremely frightened and fearful. They can’t work in the day, nor can they sleep during the night. As soon as they hear the slightest sound of an aeroplane, they flee in panic from their homes and buildings trying to find a place for security.”

Mohammad Kamran Khan, a parliamentarian from North Waziristan, told the *Express Tribune* that during a recent visit to the area he encountered people who “were angry with me for the large number of civilians killed in these attacks. They were angry with the Pakistan government and our armed forces for not doing anything to put a halt to these attacks. Also, their hatred towards America was at an all-time high.”

The Pakistani government, while officially condemning the attacks, has been fully complicit with the CIA in carrying them out. Woodward’s book describes a meeting between then-CIA Director General Michael Hayden and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in November 2008 in which drone strikes were discussed. Zardari reportedly urged the CIA to continue the attacks, saying: “Collateral damage worries you Americans. It does not worry me.”

The revelations in *Obama’s Wars* are compounding the crisis of the Zardari regime, which is widely hated for its grossly inadequate response to Pakistan’s devastating floods, as well as its collaboration with the US war in Afghanistan. The government immediately denied the book’s claims about the CIA’s private army operating in the country. Foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Basit told Agence France-Presse (AFP) on September 24: “[O]ur policy is clear, we will never allow any foreign boots on our soil... so I can tell you there are no foreign troops taking part in counter-terrorism operations inside Pakistan.” Military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas told the AFP that if any such forces were found they would “be fired upon”.

The US, however, is recklessly pursuing its expanded war in Pakistan, as it attempts to crush all resistance to its neo-

colonial domination of the resource-rich region. In a provocative act on September 25, US helicopters twice pursued a group of alleged militants across the border into Pakistan from the Afghan province of Khost. According to Khost provincial police chief Abdul Hakim Ishaqzai, the helicopters killed more than 60 people. On September 27, helicopters again crossed the border into the Kurram Agency, killing another five people.

Basit protested that the strikes were “a clear violation and breach of the UN mandate under which ISAF operates”. In response, an ISAF spokesman absurdly told McClatchy Newspapers on September 27 that the helicopters had pursued the militants “because of the imminent danger to the troops” and had acted “in self-defence”.

The Obama administration, which closely collaborated with Woodward in preparing *Obama’s Wars*, has said nothing about the CIA’s cross-border operations revealed in it. In an interview with the ABC on September 27, Woodward said the administration was aware of the revelations in the book and had allowed them to be published.

Likewise, the book reports that the US has a “retribution” plan—developed by the Bush administration and retained by Obama—to bomb “at least 150 or more” alleged Al Qaeda compounds in Pakistan in the event that a major terrorist attack is traced there. Woodward writes: “Some locations might be outdated, but there would be no concern, under the plan, for who might be living there now. The... plan called for a brutal punishing attack.”

The book is part of an ongoing campaign of threats against Pakistan. The *New York Times* reported on September 27 that the increase in CIA drone strikes reflects “mounting frustration” over the Pakistani military’s refusal “to launch military operations inside North Waziristan”. The article added that “Gen. David H. Petraeus, the top American commander in Afghanistan, has recently issued veiled warnings to top Pakistani commanders that the United States could launch unilateral ground operations in the tribal areas should Pakistan refuse to dismantle the militant networks in North Waziristan, according to American officials.”



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