CIA drone strikes kill 25 in Pakistan

Joseph Kishore
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As part of an escalating US campaign in Pakistan, missiles from suspected CIA drones killed up to 25 people on Monday.

The latest slaughter took place in the North Waziristan region, which borders Afghanistan and has been targeted by the majority of US missiles fired from unmanned aircraft over the past year. The region is said to be a stronghold of the so-called Haqqani network, which operates in Afghanistan and opposes the US occupation.

The *Los Angeles Times*, citing "Pakistani intelligence officials," reported that 25 were killed after three trucks were incinerated in two separate attacks in Mir Ali, a city that lies close to the border with Afghanistan.

One of the attacks destroyed two trucks in the village of Sher Tala, while the other destroyed a truck traveling in the village of Machikhel.

As always, those killed were described by Pakistani officials and the US media as "suspected militants" or "terrorists," even though no concrete information was provided about those killed. The US did not make any comment on the killings.

The attacks in North Waziristan followed by 10 days the killing of 54 in the Kyber tribal region, located further to the north along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. (See "US drones slaughter 54 in Pakistan")

The drone attacks are part of a sharp escalation of the US war over the past six months in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. The Obama administration has sent 30,000 more US soldiers into Afghanistan, while vastly expanding the use of CIA drones against targets in Pakistan.

According to the *Long War Journal*, there have been about 115 drone strikes in Pakistan this year, more than double the number in 2009. Close to half the strikes have taken place over the past four months. Some 778 people have been killed in strikes in 2010, not including the latest incidents. This compares to 463 in 2009 and 286 in 2008.

These figures are likely underestimates. A report in the Pakistani-daily *Nation* used information supplied by the Pakistani government to conclude that in 2009, 708 Pakistanis were killed by CIA drones (about 50 percent higher than reported by the *Long War Journal* in 2009), and that 700 of these were civilians. This would suggest that close to 1,200 have been killed so far this year.

Pakistani officials publicly oppose these attacks. Unofficially, however, the government cooperates with the US in providing the intelligence required to execute them. The Pakistani government is under intense pressure from the Obama administration to expand its own military operations in the region and launch an offensive in North Waziristan.

The *New York Times* reported last week that the administration is preparing to approve an expansion of Special Operations ground raids into Pakistan, which, according to the *Times*, "would amount to the opening up of a new front in the nine-year-old war" in Afghanistan.

A lead article in the *Times* on Monday pointed to the intensified campaign in both Afghanistan and North Waziristan against the Haqqani network, which is accused by the US of working closely with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In "Taliban Fighters Appear Quieted in Afghanistan," reporter Eric Schmitt writes that the network has seen "its momentum stymied as elite American-led commandos have escalated raids against the militants' bomb makers and logisticians."

The newspaper cites "a sixfold increase in the past year in the number of Special Operations raids against insurgents, including the Haqqanis. … In the past three months alone, commandos have carried out 1,784 missions across Afghanistan, killing or capturing 880 insurgent leaders." This escalating bloody war goes

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almost entirely unreported in the US media.

"Inside Pakistan itself," the newspaper adds, "99 of the 112 airstrikes launched by CIA drones this year have been directed at North Waziristan, the operations hub for the Haqqanis as well as one of their Waziri allies, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, according to Bill Roggio, editor of the *Long War Journal*, a web site that monitors the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan."

The *Times* notes in passing that Jalaluddin Haqqani, the titular leader of the network, which is largely run by his son, Sirajuddin, "was a legendary guerrilla fighter in the Central Intelligence Agency-backed campaign to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan in the 1980s."

In fact, Haqqani was among the principal leaders of the US-backed proxy-war against the Soviet Union and even visited the White House under the Reagan administration. He worked closely with others who traveled to Afghanistan to participate in the war, including Osama bin Laden.

At the time, the Islamic fundamentalists who would later make up the Taliban were praised by Reagan as "freedom fighters." Democratic Congressman Charlie Wilson, who helped organize the CIA operation in Afghanistan, described Haqqani as "goodness personified" after Wilson visited the region and was given a tour by Haqqani.

Haqqani later became part of the Taliban government. In the aftermath of the US invasion, he was offered a post in the government headed by Hamid Karzai, though an arrangement proved impossible.

The history of Haqqani underscores the imperialist and neocolonial character of US operations in Central Asia, which have produced a disaster for the population of the region. In the pursuit of control of the geo-strategically critical area, the US has worked with various warlords, while some of its past allies have now become enemies.

In the wake of the 2010 elections, the Obama administration has made clear that not only does it anticipate an indefinite occupation of Afghanistan, it is now preparing for an even more bloody and catastrophic intervention in Pakistan.

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