

US resumes drone missile attacks in Pakistan

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The US carried out a drone missile strike in the North Waziristan region of Pakistan Tuesday, killing four people and baldly asserting its “right” to ignore international law, violate Pakistan's sovereignty, and carry out summary executions.

The drone strike was the first since US forces killed 26 Pakistani soldiers in a warplane and helicopter-gunship assault near the Afghan border in late November. A Pentagon investigation of the November 26 clash conceded that US and NATO forces had made mistakes, including giving a Pakistan liaison officer the wrong coordinates for the impending air assault, but nonetheless defended the deadly attack as “self-defense.”

The November 26 attack sparked outrage among the Pakistani people, forcing Pakistani authorities to order an indefinite halt to all land-routed supply shipments to the US and NATO forces occupying Afghanistan. They also ordered CIA personnel to evacuate a Baluchistan military base that was used to launch spy and assault drones. Pakistan's government ordered a comprehensive review of the entire US-Pakistani partnership.

Last week, the select parliamentary committee charged with conducting that review submitted its report to the government and to the military top brass, which effectively controls the country's foreign and military-security policy.

Tuesday's drone strike reportedly targeted a house on the outskirts of Miranshah, a North Waziristan town. It came less 72 hours after the *New York Times* had led its Sunday edition with a report, based on unnamed CIA and Pentagon sources, that claimed that Al Qaeda, Taliban and other anti-US forces had made use of the hiatus in US drone strikes to strengthen themselves.

The *Times* article reported, “Diplomats and intelligence analysts say the pause in C.I.A. missile strikes—the longest in Pakistan in more than three

years—is offering ... greater freedom of movement to an insurgency that had been splintered by in-fighting and battered by American drone attacks in recent months.”

The article went on to suggest that the lull in missile strikes had facilitated a closer alliance between pro-Taliban militia based in Pakistan's tribal areas, as well as the opening up of peace negotiations between the Pakistani Taliban and the Pakistan government. While the US itself aims, after a massive bloodletting, to secure the participation of the Taliban, or at least sections of it, in a reconfigured pro-US regime in Kabul, it has always vigorously objected to any agreements between Islamabad and the pro-Taliban groups based in that country's Pashtun-speaking tribal areas.

The *Times* article was clearly orchestrated by sections of the US military-security establishment determined to trump those in the Obama administration who, in the interests of patching up relations with Islamabad and securing the reopening of the Afghan supply route, were counseling against further inflaming public opinion in Pakistan.

Fearing the growth of antiwar sentiment in Pakistan, Washington has gone to great lengths over the past 18 months to secure alternate Afghan supply routes through Russia and several former Soviet Central Asian republics. Nevertheless, as late as November more than a quarter of all food, fuel and other non-lethal material for the US troops in Afghanistan were routed through Pakistan.

Significantly, in confirming that Tuesday's strike was carried out by US forces, US officials did not claim that it had targeted any senior al-Qaeda or Taliban leader. The “routine character” of the drone strike was clearly meant as a message to Pakistan's authorities and to the Pakistani people that the US intends to continue violating Pakistani sovereignty at will.

While the Obama administration and its apologists in

the corporate media have touted the drone strikes as a surgical means of eliminating “terrorists,” they have rightly come to exemplify for millions of Pakistanis the US imperialism’s callous indifference to Pakistani life. Hundreds, if not thousands, of poor villagers have been killed in missile attacks—attacks that under the Obama administration have rained down at a pace of well over one per week. According to the pro-US “Long War” website, US forces carried out more than 180 drone missile strikes in Pakistan in 2010 and 2011.

Both Pakistan’s civilian government and military are anxious to resume routine cooperation with the US. The reactionary alliance between the Pentagon and the Pakistan military has been the pivot of the geo-political and class strategy of the Pakistani bourgeoisie for the past six decades. However, they have been constrained by the depth of the popular hostility to US imperialism.

A further complication is the increasingly fractious relation between the military and the civilian government. For the past month there have been rumors that the military, working in concert with the country’s Supreme Court and much of the opposition, is seeking to create a legal-constitutional façade for ousting the Pakistan People’s Party-led civilian government.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani sacked the Defence Secretary, a retired Lieutenant-General known to enjoy the army’s confidence and support. The army high command responded by announcing it was convening an emergency meeting of its corps commanders Thursday and, in an open challenge to the government’s authority, by having senior officers tell reporters that they will not cooperate with the new Defence Secretary.



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