

CIA drones target rescue workers, mourners

Patrick Martin
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A report by the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) has found that the US Central Intelligence Agency deliberately attacked rescue workers and funeral processions in follow-up strikes after drone missile attacks on insurgents in Pakistan's tribal areas. The findings were made public on the group's web site and published by the *Sunday Times* of London.

According to the organization, which includes British and Pakistani journalists, at least 50 civilians were killed in follow-up strikes while they were attempting to help victims of an initial CIA drone attack. Dozens more were killed by missile strikes against the funerals of victims of drone attacks.

Overall, the group found that "since Obama took office three years ago, between 282 and 535 civilians have been credibly reported as killed, including more than 60 children." Pakistani officials and humanitarian aid workers have reported much higher figures for the death toll in Pakistan's tribal areas, as many as several thousand.

Among the cases of mass murder detailed in the report:

May 16, 2009: A US drone missile hit a group of Taliban militants in the village of Khaisor, killing as many as a dozen. As villagers were digging bodies out of the rubble, two more missiles hit, bringing the death toll to at least 29.

June 23, 2009: A CIA missile strike killed Khwaz Wali Mehsud, a Pakistan Taliban commander, and five companions. Some 5,000 people attended his funeral later that day. US drones struck again, killing as many as 83 people, ten of them children.

March 17, 2011: The day after Pakistan released CIA contractor Raymond Davis, who had been jailed for two months for murdering two Pakistani men in Lahore, a CIA drone missile attack killed 42 people in North Waziristan, striking what a Pakistani military

officer said was a tribal meeting to discuss a land ownership dispute, not a Taliban gathering.

Experts on international law have characterized these follow-up drone missile strikes as war crimes. Clive Stafford Smith, who has fought for the release of many innocent men held in Guantanamo Bay, told BIJ the drone strikes "are like attacking the Red Cross on the battlefield. It's not legitimate to attack anyone who is not a combatant."

Christof Heyns, the United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, told the group: "Allegations of repeat strikes coming back after half an hour when medical personnel are on the ground are very worrying. To target civilians would be crimes of war."

In timing follow-up strikes so they incinerate people who come to the aid of victims of an initial blast, the CIA has employed a tactic that US officials regularly denounced as "terrorism" when carried out by insurgents during the Iraq war. Such attacks are carried out as a deliberate effort to inflict maximum casualties on the civilian population.

The Obama administration was stung by the BIJ report. It came only days after Obama said, in a much-publicized comment in a forum on YouTube, that "drones have not caused a huge number of civilian casualties." He called the strikes "a targeted, focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists."

The *New York Times*, in its report on the exposé, quoted "a senior American counterterrorism official" charging that those who brought to light the reality of US mass murder in Pakistan were "elements who would like nothing more than to malign these efforts and help Al Qaeda succeed."

This comment amounts to a death threat against both the journalists involved and those who supplied them with information, smearing them as aiding and abetting Al Qaeda. By quoting the statement while concealing

the name of the official, the *Times* makes itself complicit in the implied retaliation.

The report of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism is further evidence that top officials of the Obama administration, the Pentagon and CIA should be prosecuted for war crimes before an international tribunal.

The atrocities being committed in the drone missile strikes are not an aberration, but rather demonstrate the essence of the US intervention in Afghanistan and Pakistan, now in its eleventh year. The United States military/intelligence apparatus, backed by its NATO allies, is engaged in a barbaric imperialist war against the masses of oppressed people on both sides of the border.

Working people in the United States and around the world must demand the immediate withdrawal of all US and NATO troops, intelligence personnel and military contractors from Afghanistan and Pakistan and an end to the US policy of raining death and destruction on defenseless and innocent people.

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