

New US drone attacks in Pakistan and Yemen

Patrick O'Connor
4 January 2013

Marking the first US drone attacks of 2013, the Obama administration ordered two separate missile bombardments in Pakistan and Yemen on Wednesday and Thursday.

The latest attacks demonstrate that the drawdown of US-led occupying forces in Afghanistan will be accompanied by an expansion of illegal drone operations across the Middle East. At least 16 people were reported killed, all alleged Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters, though details of each incident are still emerging and Washington routinely covers up the killing of civilians in drone strikes.

On Wednesday night, approximately 10:40 pm local time, Pakistani Taliban leader Maulvi Nazir, also known as Mullah Nazir, was among several people killed in South Waziristan, the tribal region bordering Afghanistan. Nazir is among the most prominent figures to have been assassinated in recent years, having led one of the four Taliban factions in the Waziristan region.

Different reports that have emerged since the strike claim that Nazir was killed by at least two missiles fired either at a vehicle in which he was travelling near Wana, the largest town in South Waziristan, or at a house near Wana. Reports differ on how many other people were killed, with some sources suggesting eight or nine additional casualties.

Unnamed Pakistani officials were cited confirming that Nazir's senior deputies, Atta Ullah and Rafey Khan, were among the dead. These sources also claimed the others killed were Nazir's Taliban associates. Thousands reportedly attended the funerals of the men, and markets and shops closed in those parts of South Waziristan that Nazir controlled.

Yesterday, another two drone missiles struck North Waziristan, killing four more alleged Taliban militants, reportedly including two Uzbek nationals, as they were travelling in a car. Multiple sources report that a second round of drone missiles was fired when people nearby attempted to recover the bodies, though it is not known if more people were killed or injured as a result.

On the same day as the atrocity in North Waziristan,

three alleged members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula were killed while travelling in a car in Redaa, in the southern Yemeni province of Al Bayda. Redaa is where a US drone strike killed 11 civilians, including three children, on September 2.

Reuters cited a Yemeni government official as claiming that a Yemeni aircraft carried out the latest strike in Redaa, but local people who saw the US drone responsible contradicted him. Washington has ordered a series of drone attacks in Yemen in recent days, enjoying the full support of its stooge, President Mansour Al Hadi. (See "US drone strikes continue in Yemen".)

Pentagon Press Secretary George Little spoke with reporters off camera yesterday about the drone strike that killed Maulvi Nazir. Without explicitly acknowledging US responsibility, he declared: "If the reports are true, this would be a significant blow and would be very helpful, not just to the United States but also to our Pakistani partners and the Afghans... This is someone who had a great deal of blood on his hands."

President Barack Obama in fact bears responsibility for the continued bloodletting in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. While Washington is currently in a de facto alliance with Al Qaeda-connected militia groups fighting against the Syrian government, the so-called "war on terror" remains the pretext for its military operations across the Middle East.

The *New York Times* reported in November that drone strikes are estimated to have killed at least 2,500 people. This is likely a significant underestimation.

The British-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) has calculated that by August 2011, 2,347 people had been killed by drone attacks in Pakistan alone. The total included at least 392 civilians, 175 of them children. The Obama administration refuses to tally civilian deaths, arbitrarily labelling all males within a drone target area as "combatants" unless there is evidence proving otherwise.

Maulvi Nazir headed one of the Pakistani Taliban factions that had reached an agreement with the Pakistani military, with both sides pledging that their forces would

not target one another. Nazir was allied with Hafiz Gul Bahadur, leader of another militia in North Waziristan who had also signed a peace pact with the Pakistani military.

Some Pakistani army commanders labelled the two figures “good Taliban.” Nazir funnelled fighters across the Afghan border to participate in operations against the US-NATO occupying forces and also allegedly sheltered members of various Al Qaeda-affiliated groups, while at the same time cooperating with the Pakistani military. He collaborated with the army’s 2009 offensive against rival Taliban factions, which the government in Islamabad launched under intense pressure from the Obama administration.

Nazir had been targeted by rival Islamist militia leaders who have launched attacks against Pakistani military and government targets. In November, he narrowly survived a suicide bomb attack that was reportedly organised by the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP).

The London *Telegraph*’s Rob Crilly noted: “This could well herald a new time of instability as other militant factions try to vie for control... There is also a question of what this means for US-Pakistan relations. Mullah Nazir was very much an American target who, I suspect, Pakistan would have been happy to leave alone, so there is a question mark over what this means.”

The Pakistani government, dependent on US military and financial aid, publicly opposes the drone strikes as a violation of the country’s sovereignty, while privately permitting Washington to proceed. It is unclear whether any government or military figures in Islamabad were consulted before Nazir’s assassination, but the Obama administration has made clear that irrespective of any considerations of international law, it claims the right to murder anyone, including American citizens, anywhere on the planet.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact