

Reports detail CIA war crimes in Pakistan

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A series of recent articles by journalist Mark Mazzetti published in the *New York Times* have shed further light on the activities of the US Central Intelligence Agency in Pakistan. Mazzetti's articles incorporate and summarize material from his recent book, *The Way of the Knife*, which in turn was based on dozens of interviews with inside sources both in Washington and Islamabad.

In particular, Mazzetti's April 6 article, "A Secret Deal on Drones, Sealed in Blood," exposes the wanton and deliberate criminality with which the CIA launched its drone murder program in Pakistan in June 2004. Using a missile launched from a Predator drone, the CIA killed Pashtun tribal leader Nek Muhammad—who Pakistan wanted out of the way—and six other people as they were sitting down to dinner, including two children aged 16 and 10.

Mazzetti reveals that the assassination of Muhammad was part of a *quid pro quo*: the CIA agreed to murder Muhammad in return for assurances from Pakistan's authorities that the CIA would be free to use Pakistan's airspace to carry out future assassinations. Meanwhile, the governments of both Pakistan and the US agreed to falsely claim that Pakistan had carried out the attack. The two children and the other men killed in the attack were labeled "militants."

In other words, in a deal any mafia don or hit man would readily understand, America offered to do Pakistan's dirty work in return for a license from Pakistan to carry out further murders. The two governments conspired to carry out the murder, lied about who carried it out, and lied about who was killed.

The episode further exposes Pakistan's ruling establishment, which occasionally denounces the activities of the US military and intelligence agencies in the country, but which in reality is implicated in a long line of backroom conspiracies with the same agencies to murder its own citizens. According to Mazzetti, then-president Pervez Musharraf scoffed at the idea that the public would find out that the CIA was involved. "In Pakistan, things fall out of the sky all the time,"

Musharraf said.

The missile strike that killed Muhammad, without charges or trial, constitutes a war crime and a clear violation of international law.

America's deal with Pakistan included the proviso that the CIA would carry out drone assassinations only in a narrow range of areas near the Afghan border. Specifically, the US agreed that the drones would steer clear of "the mountain camps where Kashmiri militants were trained for attacks in India."

The drone assassination program launched under the Bush administration underwent a massive expansion under the Obama administration, with the rate of strikes increasing by as much as 300 percent. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham recently boasted that at least 4,700 people have been killed so far.

Nek Muhammad was among the first of the victims of the CIA reign of terror in Pakistan. While the US government claims that everyone it murders is a "militant," the victims in Pakistan have included young children and infants, rescue workers, political dissidents, mourners, and innocent bystanders. One Brookings Institution study found that for every reputed militant killed by a drone strike, ten civilians had been killed.

"The C.I.A. had approval from the White House to carry out missile strikes in Pakistan even when the agency's targeters weren't certain about exactly whom they were killing," Mazzetti explained. "Under the rules of so-called 'signature strikes,' decisions about whether to fire missiles from drones could be made based on patterns of activity deemed suspicious.

"For instance, if a group of young 'military-age males' were observed moving in and out of a suspected militant training camp and were thought to be carrying weapons, they could be considered legitimate targets. American officials admit it is nearly impossible to judge a person's age from thousands of feet in the air, and in Pakistan's tribal areas, adolescent boys are often among militant fighters. Using such broad definitions to determine who was a 'combatant' and therefore a legitimate target

allowed Obama administration officials at one point to claim that the escalation of drone strikes in Pakistan had not killed any civilians for a year.

“It was something of a trick of logic: in an area of known militant activity, all military-age males could be considered enemy fighters. Therefore, anyone who was killed in a drone strike there was categorized as a combatant.”

Mazzetti also describes how the CIA made the “switch” from torture to murder during the Bush administration. Specifically, senior CIA officials, including the CIA’s Inspector General John L. Helgerson, voiced concerns that the use of torture against prisoners captured in the course of the so-called “war on terror”—such as “confining them in a small box with live bugs”—could land CIA operatives and officials in jail. Rather than capture and interrogate, it was deemed easier just to kill them.

“Targeted killings were cheered by Republicans and Democrats alike,” Mazzetti wrote, “and using drones flown by pilots who were stationed thousands of miles away made the whole strategy seem risk-free.”

The *New York Times* itself supports the government’s drone murder program, with a few minor reservations as to the procedure. (See, *The New York Times* defends drone murder)

The *Times* urged Obama in an editorial on April 7 to “work with Congress to create a lasting legal framework for drone strikes.” The *Times* suggested that that framework should resemble “the special court that approves wiretaps for intelligence gathering”—that is, the secret rubber-stamp court established by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act that approves 99.9 percent of the government’s warrant requests.

At the same time, there are doubtless concerns within the ruling establishment—reflected in Mazzetti’s article—that the sudden return of the CIA to the “assassination business,” and the targeted killing of US citizens, has far-reaching implications.

More details of the CIA’s dirty activities in Pakistan no doubt remain to be uncovered. In particular, in the period leading up to the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, the once-collaborative relationship between the CIA and the Pakistani intelligence agencies broke down under circumstances that are not yet fully understood.

During that period, the CIA broke various promises it had made to the Pakistani authorities, including the promise to clear drone targets with them, and dramatically

ramped up the rate of killings. Meanwhile, Pakistan captured CIA operative Raymond Davis (whom the Obama administration falsely claimed was a “diplomat”) after a January 2011 incident in Lahore, in which Davis shot and killed two Pakistani civilians and an American SUV ran over and killed a third before fleeing the scene.

What Davis was doing in Pakistan has never been fully explained. A February 2011 report in the Karachi-based *Express Tribune*, an affiliate of the *International Herald Tribune*, cited a senior official in the Punjab police who claimed “that Davis was masterminding terrorist activities in Lahore and other parts of Punjab.”

Davis had “close links” with the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP), the official said. “Davis was instrumental in recruiting young people from Punjab for the Taliban to fuel the bloody insurgency.”

After the US secured Davis’ release in March 2011, the CIA bombed a tribal council meeting in the village of Datta Khel in North Waziristan, killing dozens of people. Mazzetti cites unnamed “American officials” who “suspected that the massive strike was the CIA venting its anger about the Davis episode.” (See, CIA killer Raymond Davis released by Pakistani authorities .)

According to Mazzetti, the Datta Khel massacre—which provoked intense protests and opposition within Pakistan—precipitated bitter recriminations within the Obama administration. The American ambassador in Pakistan, Cameron Munter, demanded the right to approve CIA attacks before they were carried out. This led to a meeting in which then-CIA Director Leon Panetta told Munter, “I don’t work for you.” When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sided with the ambassador, Panetta replied, “No, Hillary, it’s you who are flat wrong,” Mazzetti writes.

Obama appointed Panetta to be secretary of defense shortly afterwards, and he was unanimously confirmed by the Senate.

The latest revelations concerning the CIA’s drone murder program in Pakistan confirm the need for the immediate arrest, indictment, and prosecution of all of the top officials in the Bush and Obama administrations on charges of war crimes.



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