US drone strikes kill dozens in Yemen, Pakistan

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In the two and a half weeks since President Barack Obama's speech at the National Defense University justifying his policy of drone assassination, as many as 25 people have been killed and as many as 12 others injured in four US drone missile attacks in Pakistan and Yemen. The attacks demonstrate that the Obama administration intends to continue indefinitely its illegal assassination campaign.

An attack June 1 in Yemen by two US drones killed as many as eight people and injured three more in a strike on two vehicles allegedly carrying militants affiliated with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP is considered by the US government to be the most active branch of Al Qaeda currently operating.

Amongst those reported to have been killed in the strike were a senior AQAP militant, Awadh Ali Lakra, and an alleged militant known only as Lawar.

Following the deadly attack, Qassim al-Rimi, a senior AQAP commander, released an audio statement addressed to the United States government. In the statement he counseled the Obama administration about the folly of its foreign policy, including drone assassinations, stating that American security "is not achieved by despoiling other nations' security or by attacking and oppressing them." Al-Rimi also called on the US to "leave us with our religion, land and nations and mind your own internal affairs."

Yet another drone attack was launched in Yemen near the Saudi Arabian border June 9, killing at least three suspected AQAP militants. Among those allegedly killed was Surah Haidan, considered to be a senior AQAP leader by Yemeni officials. Yemeni officials claimed that five missiles were used in the latest attack. Residents in the area of the attack heard nearly a dozen explosions that continued even after the suspects were killed.

Abdul Salam Abdullah, an eyewitness, complained that the attack had put children at risk, "Any of our children could have easily been killed by shrapnel if they were in the wrong place during the attack. The suspects were in a vehicle and the attack could have easily happened far from homes and civilian presence."

Drone strikes in Yemen have increased significantly since President Ali Abdullah Saleh was replaced by his vice president, Abd Rabbu Masur Hadi, in February 2012. There have been 11 confirmed drone strikes in Yemen since the beginning of 2013.

In Pakistan, seven people were killed and as many as four more injured in a drone strike June 7. According to Pakistani intelligence officials, the attack came shortly after sunset in the village of Gubez in North Waziristan's Shawal region, near the border with Afghanistan. The area is known to be a stronghold of Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a coalition of militias fighting the US occupation of Afghanistan and the Pakistani state, which is collaborating with the US war.

According to *Dawn*, the strike killed Mutaqi, alias Bahadar Khan, a key TTP commander, and six other alleged militants. Mutaqi was allegedly preparing to lead the militants into Afghanistan before they were killed in the US drone attack.

The June 7 attack came approximately a week and a half after the last strike in Pakistan. A CIA drone May 29 killed at least seven people in North Waziristan, including Wali Ur-Rehman the second in command of the Pakistani Taliban. (See "First US drone strike in Pakistan since Obama's drone speech kills seven")

The latest strike in Pakistan came two days after the swearing-in of newly elected Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif. In his inaugural speech before

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parliament, Sharif called for an end to US drone attacks on Pakistani soil. “The drone attacks that are being carried out for years shall stop now. If we respect the sovereignty of other nations, these nations shall also respect the sovereignty of our country. We will devise a unanimous agenda to address the issue of drone attacks.”

He did not provide any details as to how his government would get Washington to end its drone attacks. The US government has yet to show any regard for Pakistani sovereignty or the desires of the Pakistani people, who overwhelmingly oppose the drone attacks.

On Saturday the Pakistani Foreign Office in Islamabad, on the orders of the prime minister, summoned US Chargé d’Affaires Richard Hoagland to lodge an official complaint over the most recent strike. Tariq Fatemi, the prime minister’s special advisor on foreign affairs, presented Hoagland with a protest that laid out the government’s objections to the US drone program.

According to a statement from the Pakistani Foreign Office, Fatemi “conveyed to the US CdA (Chargé d’Affaires) that the government of Pakistan strongly condemns the drone strikes which are a violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. It was also pointed out that the government of Pakistan has consistently maintained that drone strikes are counter-productive, entail loss of innocent civilian lives and have human rights and humanitarian implications.”

Sharif released a statement after the meeting condemning drone attacks as “violating our sovereignty as well as international laws. Drone attacks must stop. We have protested many a time. This is simply unacceptable.” Despite this protest, he also stated that Pakistan is “ready to facilitate the withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan and hopes that the Afghan army and security forces would be able to manage the situation.”

While it feels compelled to respond in a pro forma manner to the repeated violation of Pakistani sovereignty and the murder of thousands of Pakistanis by the US government, the Sharif government is entirely dependent on its economic and military ties to the US. (See “Pakistan’s new prime minister to continue close relations with US”)

The commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, US General Joseph F. Dunford, met with Pakistani army chief General Ashfaq Kayani and Afghan army chief General Sher Muhammad Karimi over the weekend to discuss “matters of mutual interest,” in particular, the continuation of military operations along the Af-Pak border.

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