

# Latest drone strike kills at least 16 in Pakistan

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A drone strike in the Pakistani agency of North Waziristan killed at least 16 people Tuesday, the deadliest single attack since Pakistan's new president Nawaz Sharif took office nearly a month ago. The attack is further confirmation that Obama's drone assassination program will continue unabated in spite of protests by the Pakistani government.

The attack took place in the middle of the night in the village of Sarai Darpa Khel. According to news reports, the strike targeted members of the Haqqani Network, one of the groups fighting the US occupation in Afghanistan. The American military has hypocritically accused Pakistani intelligence of having intimate ties with the Haqqani network at a time in which the American government is heavily involved in an Al-Qaeda linked proxy war in Syria.

In addition, at least one news report mentioned that the compound targeted was near a bazaar, indicating that the attack was in a relatively populated area and illustrating the indifference of the American military to civilian casualties. As of Wednesday, civilian casualty figures for the strike were not yet available.

Locals described a terrifying scene. Qayyum Khan, a local shopkeeper, told the *New York Times*: "I was sleeping on the roof of my shop as the drones were hovering in the sky. I woke up when I heard a huge bang. I saw smoke coming out of a house approximately at a distance of three kilometers." Another resident, Nasrullah Khan, told NBC News: "I never heard such a huge drone strike before. They simultaneously fired four huge missiles and jolted the entire town."

The Pakistani government released a statement condemning the attacks, declaring, "The government of Pakistan has consistently maintained that drone strikes are counterproductive, entail loss of innocent civilian lives and have human rights and humanitarian implications."

Indeed, a recent report for the US military journal *Prism* has concluded that drone strikes cause 10 times as many civilian casualties as strikes by manned aircraft. The report, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), undercuts US government claims that drone strikes cause minimal civilian casualties, as well as ubiquitous media reports describing the victims invariably as "insurgents," "militants," and "terrorists."

The largely classified report, released in June, was cited by Sarah Holewinski of the Center for Civilians in Conflict in a recent article in the *Prism* journal, published by National Defense University. Holewinski explained to the *Guardian* that "the disparity reflected greater training by fighter pilots in avoiding civilian casualties." However, given such war crimes as that documented in the "Collateral Murder" video published by Wikileaks, which shows helicopter crews deliberately gunning down unarmed civilians in Iraq, this is debatable at best.

Undoubtedly at play in this discrepancy, however, is the character of the CIA's dirty drone war in Central Asia. First revealed last year by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism was the fact that the CIA deliberately targets rescuers, mourners, funeral processions, and other people who appear at the scene after the initial strikes. As a result, the ratio of civilians to every confirmed insurgent death are as high as 50 to 1, according to a report by the Stanford and NYU law schools last year.

All of this undercuts official statements on the efficacy of drone attacks, and demonstrates the callousness with which leading officials in Washington treat the population of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In his speech at the National Defense University in May, Obama declared that "conventional air power or missiles are far less precise than drones, and likely to cause more civilian casualties and local outrage."

Dianne Feinstein, Democratic chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, went even further, declaring without a shred of evidence that drone strikes kill only “single digits” worth of civilians per year.

Using classified casualty reports, however, the CNA report concluded that the opposite was the case. Undoubtedly the administration, and Feinstein for that matter, have been aware of this for some time; as such, it is highly unlikely that the publication of the report in the *Guardian* will result in any policy shift with regards to drones. Indeed, the latest drone strike indicates that the tempo of such attacks will continue unabated.



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