

Reports document US slaughter of civilians in drone strikes

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23 October 2013

A series of reports released over the past several days document the killing of thousands of people, including hundreds of non-combatant civilians, in US drone strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and other countries. The reports, issued by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on Tuesday and the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions last Friday, expose as lies the claims of President Obama and administration officials that the drone strikes are “surgical” attacks that kill few civilians.

All three reports suggest that the United States is concealing the extent of the carnage caused by its program of extrajudicial executions and is in violation of international humanitarian law. The reports were timed to coincide with a United Nations General Assembly debate on drone attacks to take place this Friday.

Amnesty International devoted its report, *“Will I be Next?” US Drone Strikes in Pakistan*, to the results of an on-the-spot investigation into nine of the 45 reported strikes that occurred in Pakistan’s North Waziristan tribal agency, which borders Afghanistan, between January 2012 and August 2013. The report’s executive summary begins:

In October 2012, 68-year-old Mamana Bibi was killed in front of her grandchildren while gathering vegetables in her family’s large, vacant fields. She was blasted into pieces by a drone strike that appears to have been aimed directly at her. A year has passed, but the US government has not acknowledged Mamana Bibi’s death, let alone provided justice or compensation for it ...

The US appears to be exploiting the lawless and remote nature of the local region to evade accountability for violations of the right to life.

“The killing of Mamana Bibi appears to be a clear case of extrajudicial execution,” said Mustafa Qadri, the report’s author, in an interview. “It is extremely difficult to see how she could have been mistaken for a militant, let alone an imminent threat to the US.”

Exposing US claims to scrupulously avoid civilian casualties,

Amnesty provided evidence of indiscriminate attacks that could not but kill and injure noncombatants. “Amnesty International documented many cases in which residents came to the scene of an initial drone strike only to be struck in follow-up strikes,” it wrote.

It cited as an example a double drone strike in July 2012 in the village of Zowi Sidgi, which killed 18 laborers, including a 14-year-old boy, and seriously injured 22 villagers, including an eight-year-old girl. The report states:

Missiles first struck a tent in which men had gathered for an evening meal, killing eight people. Villagers rushed to the tent to search for survivors. They carried stretchers, blankets and water. Then, a few minutes later, the drones fired another set of missiles. Witnesses described a macabre scene of body parts and blood, panic and terror, as US drones continued to hover overhead.

Amnesty quoted one resident as saying, “Some people lost their hands. Others had their heads cut off. Some lost their legs. Human body parts were scattered everywhere.”

The report cites NGO and Pakistan government sources who estimate that the US carried out 330 to 374 drone strikes in Pakistan between 2004 and September 2013. The sources say that between 400 and 900 civilians have been killed in the attacks and at least 600 people seriously injured. Pakistani officials have previously put the civilian death toll in the thousands.

Amnesty reports that as of the publication of its report, the US government had not responded to its “repeated requests for comment.”

The Human Rights Watch report, *“Between a Drone and Al Qaeda ”: The Civilian Cost of US Targeted Killings in Yemen*, examines six of an estimated 80 targeted killings carried out in Yemen since 2006. It begins:

On the evening of August 29, 2012, five men gathered

in a grove of date palms behind the local Mosque in Khashamir, a village in southeast Yemen. Moments later, US remotely piloted aircraft, commonly known as drones, launched three Hellfire missiles at the group.

The strike killed four of the men instantly, hurling their body parts across the grounds. The blast of a fourth missile hit the fifth man as he crawled away, pinning him lifeless to a wall.

Yemen's Defense Ministry described three of the men as members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The other two were not connected.

The report cites a December 2009 strike in the hamlet of al-Majalah that killed 14 alleged Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula fighters and at least 41 local civilians, including nine women and 21 children. The attack used Tomahawk cruise missiles armed with cluster munitions.

It also singles out a September 2012 air strike in the village of Sarar that blew up a minibus, killing 12 passengers, including three children and a pregnant woman.

Human Rights Watch estimates that at least 57 of the 82 people killed in the attacks it investigated were civilians. It notes: "US authorities have not revealed the number of strikes, the number of civilians and alleged combatants killed or wounded, or, with few exceptions, the target of the strikes."

The attacks in Pakistan are carried out by the CIA. Those in Yemen are carried by both the CIA and the military's US Joint Special Operations Command. The Obama administration refuses to provide figures for dead and wounded, explain the legal rationale for individual attacks, or, generally, the identities of those targeted.

The report by UN special rapporteur Ben Emmerson focuses mainly on drone strikes in Afghanistan, but also covers Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Somalia. Emmerson cites data from the US Air Force that shows the number of aerial drone strikes in Afghanistan rose from 294 in 2011 to 447 in the first 11 months of 2012. Emmerson concludes that the United States is in violation of international law, in the first instance by refusing to provide information on its targeted killing program.

His report states: "The modern concept of human rights is based on the fundamental principle that those responsible for violations must be held to account. A failure to investigate and, where applicable, punish those responsible for violations of the right to life in itself constitutes a violation of that right."

In its article on the US drone strike reports, the *New York Times* on Tuesday focused on the city of Miram Shah in Pakistan's North Waziristan agency, noting that it has suffered at least 13 drone strikes since 2008, with an additional 25 in nearby districts—"more than any other urban settlement in the world."

The *Times* states that the strikes on Miram Shah "mostly

occur in densely populated neighborhoods," having thus far hit a bakery, a closed girls school and a money changers' market. The newspaper describes the devastating impact on the population of living with the constant fear of sudden death, in a place where "buzzing drones hover day and night." Calling it "a fearful and paranoid town," the *Times* speaks of a "crushing psychological burden for many residents."

These reports make clear that the drone-based targeted killing program is a calculated effort to terrorize and intimidate entire populations into accepting either direct US occupation or domination via client regimes. It is driven not by a "war on terrorism," but a determination to secure US imperialist hegemony over the oil-rich and strategically vital Middle East and Central Asia.

Obama personally devotes much of his time to overseeing the drawing up of "kill lists" and selecting targets, including US citizens, for extrajudicial execution. The information in the newly published reports shatters the claims he made in his speech last May at the National Defense University to use drone strikes only against people who pose a "continuing, imminent threat" to the United States and only in cases where the avoidance of civilian casualties is "a near certainty."

At a news briefing Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney arrogantly dismissed the series of damning reports, saying "we would strongly disagree" that the US has violated international laws. Without addressing any of the charges or evidence contained in the reports, he declared, "US counterterrorism actions are precise, they are lawful, and they are effective."

The reports, in fact, provide prima facie evidence for a future war crimes tribunal whose defendants would include Obama and top officials at the National Security Council, the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency.



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