

US drone attack kills Taliban leader in Pakistan

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Two United States drone attacks Thursday and Friday killed at least eight people, including Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leader Hakimullah Mehsud. The US attacks come one week after Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met President Obama in Washington. Sharif's regime is in the midst of a deepening crisis, caught between its strategic alliance with US imperialism on the one hand and mass opposition within the country to the criminal drone war on the other.

Top ministers of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) government charged the US of sabotaging its efforts to negotiate with Taliban groups. "The US has tried to attack the peace talks with this drone but we will not let them fail," declared Information Minister Pervez Rashid. "It is the murder of peace in this region," said Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan. US Ambassador to Pakistan Richard G. Olson was summoned on Saturday. According to the *New York Times*, quoting Khan, Olson has been warned: "Ambassador, take this government seriously. If drone attacks don't cease, there will be a standoff."

However, the Foreign Ministry adopted a more conciliatory tone. In a statement, it declared that drone strikes are "counter-productive to Pakistan's efforts to bring peace and stability in Pakistan and the region." Reportedly, the government had to cancel a three-member delegation that had planned to meet with the Taliban.

US State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki did not answer questions on Mehsud's killing but commented on the Pakistan government's negotiations with Taliban. She said it is "an internal matter for Pakistan" which "isn't a dialogue or discussion that the United States would be involved in." She added, "We certainly have a shared interest with Pakistan to bring an end to extremist violence."

On Wednesday, the Sharif government released falsified civilian casualty figures in order to downplay US war crimes in the drone war. Pakistan's Ministry of Defence

reported to the Senate, the upper house of the country's parliament, that only 67 civilians were killed since 2008 in the drone war. The Ministry of Defence also alleged that there were 59 drone attacks in 2012 and 2013 in which 319 "militants" were killed, but no civilian deaths occurred. The release of these manipulated figures was a clear signal of continued submission to US imperialism.

UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Ben Emmerson said in his report last month at least 400 civilians died in drone attacks—a very conservative estimate, given the tendency to label every military-age male assassinated in these attacks as a "militant". Emmerson claimed to have obtained some of his information directly from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, and he said that Pakistan's official government figures were "strikingly at odds" with the figures in his report.

Each drone attack is a violation of Pakistan sovereignty and international law. The drone war, which has been massively expanded under the Obama administration, has condemned entire regions to a state of constant terror, disrupting civil life and traumatizing whole populations. There is a growing outcry against these attacks within Pakistan and internationally.

A key US demand is Islamabad's assistance in crushing resistance to the occupation of Afghanistan in the border regions, including the TTP (or Paksitani Taliban), which supports the Taliban anti-occupational insurgency in Afghanistan. The US is already facing a deepening crisis ahead of Afghan elections and a partial troop drawdown scheduled for next year. So far, it has failed to secure a deal with its puppet regime in Kabul for the continued occupation of Afghanistan. Part of this deal would involve negotiations with the Afghan Taliban.

The depth of the crisis was reflected in the US Special Forces raid last month on an Afghan government convoy that was carrying senior TTP leader Latifullah Mehsud.

Kabul initially said Mehsud is being recruited as a peace emissary. However, *New York Times* revealed Afghan intelligence was trying to “recruit proxies” and aid TTP “in their fight against Pakistan’s security forces.” The target was an “opportunity to bring peace on our terms,” the report quoted Afghan official. The report said CIA and US military officials have previously “suggested” that Kabul proceed with such plans.

US imperialism’s continuous intervention, however, deepens the crisis inside Pakistan. The drone war and Pakistan army’s offensives targeting militants in border regions with Afghanistan is already fuelling a bloody civil war that has spread across the country in the form of rising sectarian violence. “Every drop of Hakimullah’s blood will turn into a suicide bomber,” TTP Spokesman Azam Tariq said after Mehsud’s killing, signalling more violence. “America and their friends shouldn’t be happy because we will take revenge for our martyr’s blood,” he added. Pakistan government has increased security measures, especially in Balochistan, after the killing.

Declaring the drone attack “sabotaged” the peace process, Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI) leader Imran Khan rhetorically declared, “Even if we lose our provincial government [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa], we will not let NATO supplies pass through as long as drone strikes do not stop.” PTI’s climb to third largest party in the parliament from its marginal role in Pakistan politics was bound up with its increasing identification with opposition to drone war. Despite its anti-war posture, PTI does not rule out collaboration with US imperialism. His demand that the federal government must blockade NATO supplies was rejected by Minister Rashid saying, “Tit-for-tat actions flare up fire.”

No section of the Pakistani bourgeoisie maintains a principled opposition to US imperialism. Historically, the Pakistani bourgeoisie has sought its own survival within the framework of US regional hegemony by subordinating to its demands. Its decades of collaboration include helping to build the anti-Soviet mujahideen guerrilla movement in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the precursor to Afghanistan’s Taliban and Al Qaeda. Together with the CIA, Pakistan’s Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) continued to maintain their associations and sought to exploit those to influence Kabul.

A *Washington Post* report on October 24 detailed extensive communication and collaboration with Pakistan’s government and military between 2007 and 2011 in the course of the CIA-run drone assassination program. This includes military strongman Pervez

Musharraf’s government and the former Pakistan Peoples Party-led coalition that initially consisted of PML-N as well.

A day before, Sharif spoke alongside Obama from the White House, attempting to placate popular opposition to the drone war back home, on which he had relied in May to secure his election. Sharif said the issue of drones was discussed with US officials, “emphasizing the need for an end to such strikes.” The lengthy joint press release, however, did not carry any mention of “drones.”

The October 24 *Post* report is based on “top-secret CIA documents and Pakistani diplomatic memos” it has obtained. According to the *Post*, some drone attacks were “at the request of” Pakistan’s government, while some others were the result of a “joint CIA-ISI targeting effort.” This dirty collaboration extends to the notorious “signature strikes” where drones are launched without a specific target, and the victim is selected from the air based on “patterns of behaviour” that are supposedly “militant”.

The Pakistan government’s claim that no civilian has been killed in the drone war since January 2012 is absurd on its face. The Amnesty International report “*Will I be Next?*” *US Drone Strikes in Pakistan*, extensively documented two attacks in 2012 that killed 19 civilians. In one attack 18 labourers were killed while in the other a grandmother was killed and her five grandchildren were injured. One of these grandchildren gave testimony in a US Congressional hearing last week: “Now I prefer cloudy days when the drones don’t fly.”



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