

White House promises CIA will stop using fake vaccination programs to spy

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21 May 2014

Following the deaths of more than 50 health care workers in Pakistan in retaliation for the CIA's use of a fake vaccination operation in the country, the White House told health officials that the CIA has pledged to stop using vaccination programs as a front for their spying activities.

In a letter addressed to 12 US public health schools, who sent a letter to the White House a year ago protesting the CIA's actions, Lisa Monaco, the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, said that the CIA directed its agents to "make no operational use of vaccination programs, which includes vaccination workers."

Her words tacitly imply that, before this, the CIA had used such programs. Moreover, given the Obama administration's record of lying about the illegal activities of the intelligence agencies—most notably NSA's domestic spying—there is little reason to believe that CIA actually intends to stop the operations in question.

The admission comes on the heels of a declaration of emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) over the spread of polio, particularly in Pakistan, where scores of health workers were killed after the CIA's program became common knowledge.

The CIA spying program was first revealed in July 2011, when the *Guardian* reported that "The CIA organized a fake vaccination programme in the town where it believed Osama bin Laden was hiding in an elaborate attempt to obtain DNA from the fugitive al-Qaida leader's family."

The CIA's key player in the operation, Dr. Shakil Afridi, who oversaw the Bin Laden DNA collection mission, was arrested in Pakistan and, initially, sent to jail for 33 years, before his sentencing was overturned. His trial was publicized throughout Pakistan, and he is

set for a retrial in the coming months.

In 2012, Hillary Clinton, then the secretary of state, praised Dr. Afridi and denounced his imprisonment. According to the *New York Times*, "Anger [in Pakistan] deepened when American lawmakers called Dr. Afridi a hero and threatened to cut off aid if he was not released."

The *Times* also noted that attacks on vaccination workers had increased following the revelation that the CIA had used Pakistani doctors in fake vaccination campaigns for their clandestine operations. According to Fox News, "Taliban militants accused health workers of acting as spies for the US."

Since December 2012, Taliban militias in Pakistan have killed 56 people who were either health care workers or their bodyguards. In 2012, vaccinations were outlawed in tribal areas by the Taliban.

The increasing violence has led Pakistani health care workers to require escorts by armed guards. In March of this year, Salma Farooqi, a polio vaccinator, was kidnapped by armed militants in her home and brutally murdered.

Anita Zaida, a Pakistani doctor, told *PBS* that the CIA's spy operation "has hugely damaged public health programs, not only in Pakistan, but in many, many countries, because people ask all kinds of questions. They now think that the vaccine programs might actually be spy operations."

The result of the breakdown in trust of health workers has been a massive resurgence of polio. So far in 2014, during the off-season for polio spread, there have been 77 new documented cases of polio worldwide. Of these, 61 were in Pakistan, largely, from the tribal areas.

There is a serious risk of this strand of polio infecting nearby areas, particularly the Middle East. The severity of the situation caused the WHO to declare a Public

Emergency of International Concern, only the second time it has done so in history.

The deeply impoverished tribal areas of Pakistan, which border Afghanistan, have been the subject of an illegal, aerial bombing campaign, with more than 300 strikes happening under Obama's tenure. US drone strikes have killed thousands of Pakistanis in the past 10 years, many of them civilians and children.



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