

First US drone strike in Pakistan since Obama's drone speech kills seven

By Niles Williamson
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On Wednesday, the US launched a drone strike in Pakistan's North Waziristan tribal region, killing at least seven people. The strike, the first since Pakistan's May 11 elections and Obama's speech on drone policy last week, was a clear message that Washington intends to continue its global campaign of drone strikes—violating Pakistan's national sovereignty and summarily murdering Pakistanis.

In yesterday's attack, a CIA drone fired two missiles, destroying a house purportedly used as a meeting place for Taliban militants in the village of Chashma Pull. Three children were amongst those reported injured in the attack.

The victims reportedly included Wali Ur-Rehman, the second-in-command of Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a coalition of Pakistani militias fighting the US occupation of Afghanistan and the Pakistani state, which is collaborating with the US war.

TTP spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan refused to confirm or deny that Rehman had been killed in the strike. It is not uncommon for those targeted for murder by Washington to be reported dead, only to resurface at a later date.

In 2010 the US government listed Rehman as a "specially designated global terrorist" and had a \$5 million dollar bounty placed on his head. He is wanted for his suspected involvement in a suicide attack by a Jordanian double agent that killed seven CIA agents and wounded six others in December 2009 at Camp Chapman in Khost, Afghanistan.

According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, there have been 13 CIA drone strikes in Pakistan since the start of 2013, including Wednesday's attack. It is estimated that these strikes have killed between 49 and 94 people. Since the beginning of Obama's presidency in January 2009, there have been 317 drone strikes in

Pakistan, killing several thousand people and injuring thousands more, including many women, children and civilians.

Obama significantly escalated the drone assassination campaign, which began under his predecessor, George W. Bush. One of Obama's first acts in office was to authorize two separate drone strikes in Pakistan that killed as many as twenty-nine civilians, including five children.

Wednesday's attack is the first since Obama's speech at the National Defense University in Washington, DC in which he laid out a supposed shift in his drone assassination policy.

In the speech, Obama effectively acknowledged that his administration's campaign of CIA drone murder provokes deep opposition abroad and boosts powerful antidemocratic forces at home. He said, "In the absence of a strategy that reduces the wellspring of extremism, a perpetual war—through drones or Special Forces or troop deployments—will prove self-defeating, and alter our country in troubling ways." (See also: "The war on terror and the fate of US democracy")

Yesterday's strike makes clear that despite Obama's observation that a campaign of unaccountable drone murder is incompatible with democracy and is hated overseas, the US government intends to continue these killings.

Responding to growing opposition to the drone campaign within Pakistan and internationally, UN officials admitted earlier this month that the US drone strikes in Pakistan launched over the objections of the country's government violate international law.

There is deep anger among Pakistanis over the Obama administration's expansion of the Afghan war into Pakistan and Washington's disregard for Pakistan's laws and national sovereignty. Beyond

continuous drone strikes, a series of incidents has stoked anger at US war policy in Pakistan. In 2011 alone, these include the US Special Forces raid into Pakistan to murder Osama bin Laden, the murder of two Pakistani men by CIA contractor Raymond Davis, and the US bombardment of a military border post that killed dozens of Pakistani troops.

After visiting Pakistan, UN Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights Ben Emmerson concluded in his report that, “As a matter of international law, the US drone campaign is therefore being conducted without the consent of the elected representatives of the people, or the legitimate government of the state. It involves the use of force on the territory of another state without its consent, and is therefore a violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty.” (See: “UN says US drone war in Pakistan violates international law”)

The United States government utilizes drone strikes not only to murder its enemies but also to terrorize the masses of Pakistanis.

According to a report by Stanford and New York University law specialists, “Living under Drones,” residents of Pakistani border areas live in constant fear of drone strikes: “Drones hover twenty-four hours a day over communities in northwest Pakistan, striking homes, vehicles, and public spaces without warning. Their presence terrorizes men, women, and children, giving rise to anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities. Those living under drones have to face the constant worry that a deadly strike may be fired at any moment, and the knowledge that they are powerless to protect themselves.”

The recent drone strike also exposes Pakistani bourgeois politicians who criticized US drone strikes in their campaigns for the May 11 elections. Figures like Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) or Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) made limited criticisms of US policy, appealing to mass discontent with drone strikes. However, the entire Pakistani political establishment—including the critical force in Pakistani bourgeois politics, the army—has in the final analysis supported the US war.

Sharif is expected to be sworn in as Prime Minister next week, after the completion of coalition talks with the Islamic fundamentalist party Jamiat

Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F).

Former cricket star Imran Khan condemned the attacks on his Twitter page, tweeting: “Strongly condemn the drone attack in NWA again [especially] just before new [provisional] & central [governments] are sworn in,” and later, “Obama had committed [to] no drones without [Pakistan government] consultation! Drones Illegal, [against] human rights & violation of [Pakistan] sovereignty! Unacceptable.”

Pakistan’s Foreign Office released a statement expressing concern over the drone strike, stating that the government “has consistently maintained that the drone strikes are counter-productive, entail loss of innocent civilian lives, have human rights and humanitarian implications and violate the principles of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law.”

In the course of his campaign, Sharif had indicated that he would pursue peace talks with the TTP. The TTP had indicated their willingness to engage the Pakistani government in peace talks. This murder on TTP’s second-in-command is likely to have significant consequences to block talks that might have taken place.

Sharif has yet to make a statement on this latest attack.

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