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Obama Sets Up Killer Drone Raid over Pakistan Despite Civilian Deaths

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Since taking office, President Obama has sanctioned at least 41 Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) drone strikes in Pakistan that have killed between 326 and 538 people, many of them, critics say, “innocent bystanders, including children,” according to reliable reports. The drone is a remotely controlled, unmanned aircraft.

> “Even if a precise account is elusive,” writes Jane Mayer in the October 26th The New Yorker, “the outlines are clear: the C.I.A. has joined the Pakistani intelligence service in an aggressive campaign to eradicate local and foreign militants, who have taken refuge in some of the most inaccessible parts of the country.”

Based on a study just completed by the non-profit, New America Foundation of Washington, D.C., “the number of drone strikes has risen dramatically since Obama became President,” Mayer reports.

In fact, the first two strikes took place on Jan. 23, the President’s third day in office and the second of these hit the wrong house, that of a pro-government tribal leader that killed his entire family, including three children, one just five years of age.

At any time, the C.I.A. apparently has “multiple drones flying over Pakistan, scouting for targets,” the magazine reports. So many Predators and its more heavily armed companion, the Reaper, are being purchased that defense manufacturer General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, of Poway, Calif., can hardly make them fast enough. The Air Force is said to possess 200.

Mayer writes, “the embrace of the Predator program has occurred with remarkably little public discussion, given that it represents a radically new and geographically unbounded use of state-sanctioned lethal force.” Today, Mayer writes, “there is no longer any doubt that targeted killing has become official U.S. policy.” And according to Gary Solis, who teaches at Georgetown University’s Law Center, nobody in the government calls it assassination. “Not only would we have expressed abhorrence of such a policy a few years ago; we did,” Solis is quoted as saying.

David Kilcullen, a counter-insurgency warfare authority who co-authored a study for the Center for New American Security, of Washington, D.C., has suggested the drone attacks have backfired. As he told The New Yorker, “Every one of these dead non-combatants represents an alienated family, a new revenge feud, and more recruits for a militant

movement that has grown exponentially even as drone strikes have increased."

And because of the C.I.A. program's secrecy, Mayer writes, "there is no visible system of accountability in place, despite the fact that the agency has killed many civilians inside a politically fragile, nuclear-armed country with which the U.S. is not at war."

The New Yorker further reports the Obama Administration has also expanded the sphere of authorized drone assaults in Afghanistan. An August Senate Foreign Relations Committee report said the Pentagon's list of approved terrorist targets held 367 names and included some 50 Afghan drug lords "who are suspected of giving money to help finance the Taliban," Mayer reports. She quotes the Senate report as stating, "There is no evidence that any significant amount of the drug proceeds goes to Al Qaeda."

It is the military's version of the drone assaults that operates in Afghanistan and Iraq, while the C.I.A.'s drones hunt terror suspects in countries where U.S. troops are not based and is "aimed at terror suspects around the world," Mayer writes. The C.I.A. effort was launched by Obama's predecessor, and a former aide to President George W. Bush says Obama has left nearly all the key personnel in place.

Running the C.I.A. program is a team of operators that handle Predator flights off runways in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Once aloft, the Predators are passed over to controllers at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va., who maneuver joysticks and monitor events from a live video feed from the drone's camera.

The magazine article reports the government plans to commission "hundreds more" of the drones, including "new generations of tiny 'nano' drones, which can fly after their prey like a killer bee through an open window."

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