

Only 84 of 2,379 US Drone Attack Victims in Pakistan Confirmed Al-Qaeda Militants

By [RT](#)

Global Research, October 18, 2014

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CIA drones strikes in Pakistan have killed nearly 2,400 people since 2004. But despite US claims it just hits “confirmed terrorist targets,” only 84 of the victims have been named Al-Qaeda members, a report revealed.

On October 11, the US carried out its 400th drone strike in northwest Pakistan since its strikes started there in 2004. In almost a decade, 2,379 people have been killed.

“Only 704 of the 2,379 dead have been identified, and only 295 of these were reported to be members of some kind of armed group,” the UK-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism [found](#) out.

As a part of its Naming the Dead project, the bureau collected the names and, where it was possible, the details of people killed by the CIA using a multitude of sources.

“These include both Pakistani government records leaked to the bureau, and hundreds of open source reports in English, Pashtun and Urdu,” they noted.



Image: Pakistani tribesmen gather for funeral prayers before the coffins of people allegedly killed in a US drone attack, claiming that innocent civilians were killed during a June 15 strike in the North Waziristan village of Tapi, 10 kilometers away from Miranshah, on June 16, 2011.(AFP Photo / Thir Khan)

It appears that less than 4 percent or 84 of the total number of killed have been identified as Al-Qaeda members.

These figures contradict what the US Secretary of State said in May, 2013, defending the CIA drone program as one of the “most accountable.”

“The only people we fire at are confirmed terror targets, at the highest level. We don’t just fire a drone at somebody we think is a terrorist,” John Kerry said.

But the UK Bureau of Investigative Journalism reveals that “more than a third” of those described as militants “were not designated a rank” and “almost 30 percent are not even linked to a specific group.”

“Judging by the sheer volume of strikes and the reliable estimates of total casualties, it is very unlikely that the majority of victims are senior commanders,” Mustafa Qadri, Pakistan researcher for Amnesty International, was cited in the report as saying.

In fact, only 111 of those killed in Pakistan since 2004 were described as a senior commander of any armed group, the bureau has found. Another 73, according to the Naming the Dead project, were mid-ranking members of armed groups.

When the bureau asked US National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden for a

comment, she said that strikes were only carried out when there was “near-certainty” that no civilians would be killed.

“The death of innocent civilians is something that the US Government seeks to avoid if at all possible. In those rare instances in which it appears non-combatants may have been killed or injured, after-action reviews have been conducted to determine why, and to ensure that we are taking the most effective steps to minimize such risk to non-combatants in the future,”

said Hayden.

When in September, 2001, three days after 9/11, the US Congress signed the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (Aumf) it gave the US President the right to use “all necessary and appropriate force” against those behind the attacks on America.

But the Aunmf did not name any particular group. Speaking at the National Defense University in May, 2013, President Obama determined the US main target as “Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and its associated forces.”



Image: US President Barack Obama waves after speaking about his administration’s drone and counterterrorism policies, as well as the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, at the National Defense University in Washington, DC (AFP Photo / Saul Loeb)

Asked what the “associate forces” stand for, Hayden said: “It is an organized armed group that has entered the fight alongside Al-Qaeda and is a co-belligerent with Al-Qaeda in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners.”

However, based on CIA documents, the UK-based bureau stresses that the US does not seem to know the affiliation of everyone they fire at. In April, 2013, the McClatchy news

agency revealed that, in its recordings, the CIA identified hundreds of those killed as simply Afghan or Pakistani fighters, or as “unknown.”

The report speaks about two branches of the Taliban, one operating in Afghanistan and one in Pakistan. The latter was not designated by the US a terrorist group until September, 2010. So, it says, when it comes to the Taliban, it’s “problematic” to determine affiliation.

Moreover, the US doesn’t always carry out strikes based on its priorities, the reports said, citing media reports. It has been revealed the CIA made deals with Pakistan. In exchange for targeting militants in Pakistan’s tribal areas, Islamabad helped the US hit Al-Qaeda members.

First reported by McClatchy news agency last year, it was then echoed by the New York Time, which disclosed that the US first drone strike in June 2004 was a part of one of such deals with Pakistan.

The United States resumed its drone attacks in Pakistan this June, after almost a 12-month hiatus. Washington sees the airstrikes as an effort to minimize the global terrorist threat.

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