

Drone Warfare: US Covert Actions in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia

January 2013 Update:

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Region: [Asia](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#),
[sub-Saharan Africa](#)

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In [Pakistan](#) a heavy CIA drone campaign targeted both so-called 'good' and 'bad' Taliban. Three senior militants were among the dead. [Yemen](#) was hit by the highest number of airstrikes in one month since June 2012, though none have been formally confirmed as US operations. No US operations were reported in [Somalia](#). The United Nations also launched [a major investigation](#) into the legality and casualties of drone strikes by the United States, Britain and Israel.

Pakistan January 2013 actions

Total CIA strikes in January: 6

Total killed in strikes in January: 27-54, of whom 0-2 were reportedly civilians

All actions 2004 – January 31 2013

Total Obama strikes: 310

Total US strikes since 2004: 362

Total reported killed: 2,629-3,461

Civilians reported killed: 475-891

Children reported killed: 176

Total reported injured: 1,267-1,431

[For the Bureau's full Pakistan databases click here.](#)

The CIA began 2013 with six drone strikes in nine days – more in any single month since [August 2012](#).



With double the strikes hitting Pakistan this month compared with January last year, 2013 could see renewed intensity in the CIA drone programme.

The month's first strike killed powerful Taliban commander Maulvi (or Mullah) Nazir, 'perhaps [the most prized feather](#) in [the] cap' of the drone programme to date, according to one commentator. Nazir co-ordinated attacks on Nato and Afghan forces in Afghanistan and

had long been a target of the CIA.

However his group refrained from terrorist attacks within Pakistan, earning the label 'good' Taliban. [Brigadier Asad Munir, a retired commander of the ISI](#), told the Bureau his death could cause serious problems for Islamabad. He said peace with Nazir was essential since Pakistan's army cannot simultaneously fight both Nazir's militants and the TTP – the so-called 'bad' Taliban behind numerous lethal attacks in Pakistani cities.

Despite this, Pakistan's response to the strikes in January was muted – notably so, [according to Associated Press](#), as loud protestations had followed almost every strike in 2012.

This could indicate that [relations between the allies](#) have improved from their 2012 nadir. The CIA may also have tried to mollify Islamabad by killing senior TTP commander Wali Muhammad Mahsud and announcing that Maulana Fazlullah, [commander of the Swat Taliban](#), is now high on its kill list. The Swat Taliban shot [schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai](#) and launches attacks on Pakistan from its bases in Afghanistan. Islamabad has repeatedly called on Nato and Afghan forces to crack down on the group.

A third high-value target death in January was of senior al Qaeda [paramilitary commander](#) Sheikh Yaseen al Kuwaiti, reportedly killed at home with his [wife and daughter](#) by eight missiles.

Yemen

January 2013 actions

Confirmed US drone strikes: 0

Further reported/possible US strike events: 8

Total reported killed in US operations: 0-38

Civilians reported killed in US strikes: 0-7

Children reported killed in US strikes: 0-2

All actions 2002 – January 31 2013*

Total confirmed US operations: 54-64

Total confirmed US drone strikes: 42-52

Possible additional US operations: 135-157

Of which possible additional US drone strikes: 77-93

Total reported killed: 374-1,112

Total civilians killed: 72-178

Children killed: 27-37

[Click here for the full Yemen data.](#)

** All but one of these actions have taken place during Obama's presidency. Reports of incidents in Yemen often conflate individual strikes. The range in the total strikes and total drone strikes we have recorded reflects this.*

Eight strikes hit Yemen in January, the most in a month since June 2012 when US attacks on al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) began to slow from their May peak.

News reports named 12 alleged militants killed in the strikes. Up to two children also reportedly died when a wayward airstrike missed its intended target, hitting [Abdu Mohammed al-Jarrah](#)'s house. This is the first credible report of child casualties since a US strike killed 12 civilians, three of them children, on [September 2, 2012](#).

It remains unclear who is behind the recent strikes. September was the last time the Bureau noted a confirmed US operation in Yemen, although Yemen's state media appears to have stopped claiming that the '[barely functional](#)' Yemen Air Force is responsible for every strike. Attacks are now officially described simply as airstrikes.

There were more allegations that the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) is striking AQAP. A report claimed the [RSAF targeted](#) an AQAP training camp on January 22, right on the Saudi-Yemeni border. But it was also reported that US drones launched the strike, with help from [Saudi intelligence](#).

An anonymous [US intelligence official](#) told the Times that Saudi jets have been striking other targets in Yemen in support of US operations – an allegation [promptly denied](#) by the Saudis. The paper reported that Saudi jets may have carried out [a botched strike](#) on May 15 2012 that killed 12-26 civilians. There were also questions raised regarding a September 2 strike by an unidentified aircraft that killed 12 civilians – three of them children. However, it [emerged on Christmas Day](#) that US drones or jets had carried out that attack.

In a rare display of opposition to the drone programme, Yemeni human rights minister [Hooria Mashhour told Reuters](#) the country should change its counter-terrorism strategy. Without directly mentioning drones, she advocated moving away from air strikes to ground operations to target AQAP 'without harming civilians and without leading to human rights violations'.

On January 28 Sanaa sent up to [7,000 troops](#) with tanks to drive AQAP-linked militants out of the central province of al Bayda and to free hostages including [two Finnish and one Austrian](#). AQAP countered, sending 'several hundred' reinforcements to the province. At least [2,500 civilians](#) have reportedly been displaced.

Somalia

January 2013 actions

Total reported US operations: 0

All actions 2007 – January 31 2013

Total US operations: 10-23

Total US drone strikes: 3-9

Total reported killed: 58-170

Civilians reported killed: 11-57

Children reported killed: 1-3

[Click here for the Bureau's full data on Somalia.](#)

January was the fifth consecutive month without [a reported US strike](#). But al Shabaab showed it remains a threat to Mogadishu, launching a suicide attack on the presidential palace. The bomber was reportedly '[an al Shabaab defector](#)' with a gate pass and a National Security Force identity card. He detonated his suicide vest, killing two soldiers, after it was uncovered in a routine search.

The US provided '[limited technical support](#)' to a failed French attempt to rescue a spy held hostage by al Shabaab since 2009. Five French helicopters carried 50 commandos into Somalia. US Air Force jets entered Somali airspace in support, although they did not fire their weapons. The French operation was reportedly timed to coincide with the French air and ground offensive in northern Mali, though [Paris denied](#) the two operations were linked.

France said militants executed the captured [secret service officer](#), known by his alias Denis Allex, during the assault. Seventeen alleged militants, including their commander Sheikh Ahmed were reportedly killed.

But in the course of the night assault, French commandos also reportedly killed [eight civilians](#), including a child and both his parents. One French commando was also killed and another wounded. Al Shabaab said the injured soldier subsequently died of his wounds in their custody, and posted pictures on Twitter of the dead commando as proof.

After al Shabaab also tweeted an image of the dead French spy, and threatened to [kill two Kenyan hostages](#) its [account was suspended](#).

UN investigation

UN special rapporteur Ben Emmerson QC announced that the UN will [investigate covert CIA and Pentagon](#) strikes in Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia. He will also look at strikes by the UK and US in Afghanistan, and by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Emmerson has assembled a team of experts to scrutinise some 25 strikes, examining the legal framework for targeted killings and claims of civilian deaths. One area they are expected to explore is the deliberate targeting of rescuers and funeral-goers by the CIA in Pakistan, a tactic revealed in an [investigation](#) by the Bureau for the Sunday Times.

The UN's Human Rights Council asked its special rapporteurs to investigate drone strikes after nations including Russia, China and Pakistan called for action last June. Emmerson will present his recommendations to the General Assembly in October.

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