

White House U-turns on Pakistan Drone Deaths. “Deaths by CIA Strikes Not included in the Numbers”

By [Reprieve](#)

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The Obama Administration has reversed its position on which countries will be included in its upcoming estimate of the civilian deaths caused by the US drone program, according to a report in yesterday's Washington Post.

Earlier this week, a report in the *Post* – based on briefings from anonymous Administration officials – stated that strikes taken in Pakistan by the CIA would not be included in the numbers. However, an article in yesterday's *Post* – also based on anonymous US government sources – now suggests that the White House has changed its position, and will include strikes taken in Pakistan in its tally.

The exclusion of Pakistan would have meant that as many as two-thirds of known US drone strikes – including some of the worst reported errors – would have been left out of the US tally of deaths. Strikes in Pakistan have included an attack on a funeral in June 2009 that killed as many as 50 civilians, and a strike on a meeting of tribal elders in March 2011 that killed 41. Pakistan has reportedly seen the use of some of the most controversial aspects of the US drone program, such as ‘signature strikes’, where individuals are targeted on the basis of patterns of behavior.

The absence of the Pakistan numbers would also have avoided any need to address controversial claims made in June 2011 by John Brennan, now Director of the CIA. At the time, Brennan said that no civilians had been killed during a yearlong period from 2010 to 2011. However, in August that year, he altered his position slightly, saying there was no “credible evidence” of such deaths. The Administration has never publicly disputed or corrected his statement.

Recent research by the human rights organization Reprieve – which assists the civilian victims of drone strikes – has found that the US is frequently unable to identify those killed by covert strikes in countries including Pakistan and Yemen. Reprieve has found that, in targeting 41 named individuals, US strikes killed 1,147 unknown men, women and children – often leaving the original target still alive.

Commenting, Jennifer Gibson, staff attorney at Reprieve, said:

It's been three years since President Obama promised long-overdue transparency over the most dangerous legacy of his Presidency – a drone programme that has reportedly killed thousands in countries where the US is

not at war. In that time, we have been inundated with repeated and contradictory claims about the program from 'anonymous' sources who cannot be held accountable for their claims.

This week, the Administration's spin machine was once again in action, first leaking that the government's numbers would not include Pakistan – a country that accounts for three-quarters of all strikes – and then absurdly walking back that position. Enough panicked legacy spinning – the Administration must reveal the true scale of the civilian deaths it has caused, and at the very least, offer an apology to the victims.

Notes

1. Reprieve is an international human rights organization. Reprieve's London office can be contacted on: communications [at] reprieve.org.uk / +44 (0) 207 553 8140. [Reprieve US](#), based in New York City, can be contacted on Katherine [dot] oshea [at] reprieve.org / +1 917 855 8064.
2. The US Government's claim that Pakistan will be included in its tally was reported by the *Washington Post*, [here](#), while the previous claims can be found in the *Post*'s earlier report, [here](#).
3. The 2011 comments by John Brennan can be found [here](#).
4. Reprieve's recent research into deaths under the US drone program is available [here](#).

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