

INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

Wednesday, May 12, 2010, Jamadi-ul-Awwal 27 , 1431 A.H.

RSS ISSN 1563-9479

Group Chairman: Mir Javed Rahman

Founded by: Mir Khalil-ur-Rahman

Editor-in-Chief: Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman

Home | Top Stories | World | National | Business | Sports | Karachi | Lahore | Islamabad | Peshawar | Editorial | Opinion | Stock | Instep Today | Newspost | Aman ki Asha



WEEKLY SECTIONS

TheNews on Sunday
You
Health Body & Mind
Technobytes
Iqra
Galaxy
Tapestry
Education-Zine
Us
Cyber@print
Investor's J.
Viewers' Forum
Today's Cartoon
Style
Business & Finance
Review
Instep
MAG Fashion
Blog
FEATURES
Opinion Archive
Fashion Archive
Magazine Archive
Style Archive
FINANCE
Currency Rates
KSE Index
Bullion Rates
Prize Bonds

Weekly Magazine
Archive



ShareThis

The consensus about the drones—II

Like 3 people like this.

Wednesday, May 12, 2010
By Mosharraf Zaidi

There is, of course, considerable variance in the estimates. Since President Obama announced his plans to "surge" in Afghanistan, a steady stream of analysis and op-eds have sought to understand the impact of drone attacks.

The seminal op-ed published in the New York Times op-ed on May 16, 2009, by David Kilcullen and Andrew Exum both advisers to top US military leaders, including Gen. Petraeus concludes that drone strikes made winning against insurgents in the tribal areas more difficult. Primarily because of the huge innocent civilian toll of drone attacks, though it dramatically downgraded the actual percentage of civilian casualties, stating that "Based on our count of the estimated number of militants killed, the real total of civilian deaths since 2006 appears to be in the range of 250 to 320, or between 31 and 33 per cent."

On October 19, 2009, the New America Foundation released a study by Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, entitled "Revenge of the Drones". It confirmed the high civilian cost of drone attacks over the same time period, though it dramatically downgraded the actual percentage of civilian casualties, stating that "Based on our count of the estimated number of militants killed, the real total of civilian deaths since 2006 appears to be in the range of 250 to 320, or between 31 and 33 per cent."

One dramatically lower estimate is the one made by Bill Roggio of the Long War Journal. Roggio is a favourite of the far-right, neoconservative establishment in the US. His estimate is that since 2006, there have been 1,153 terrorists killed, and only 94 innocent civilians. This is a dramatically different set of number to Exum and Kilcullen's.

On December 3, 2009 Scott Shane wrote in the New York Times that in fact, civilian casualties were even lower than the hawkish Roggio's estimates. Shane quoted an anonymous Pakistani source saying only 20 of the over one thousand deaths caused by drones were those of innocent Pakistanis.

Bergen and Tiedemann responded immediately with an article at Foreign Policy magazine's website, titled "About Those Civilian Casualties" on December 4, 2009. They argue that, "What is troubling and in our view, highly unlikely is the official's claim that only some 20 civilians have been killed by these drone strikes, a fatality rate of only around five per cent."

Bergen and Tiedemann then conclude by revising their October estimate, saying "Our own data shows that if we consider just the period from 2008 until the present, the average civilian fatality rate is between 35 and 40 per cent".

What is interesting about this estimate for 2008 onward is that it completely contradicts Roggio's numbers, which show a dramatically lower instance of casualties in the latter years (and none at all in 2010).

On February 24, 2010 Bergen and Tiedemann released another study entitled "The Year of the Drone", lowered their estimate of civilian casualties to 32 per cent, while increasing the timeline under observation to as far back as 2004. They also conclude that "The drone attacks in the tribal regions seem to remain the only viable option for the United States to take on the militants based there."

Again on the same day (February 24, 2010) David Rittger from the libertarian Cato Institute made an impassioned case for the continued use of drones in the Wall Street Journal, further deepening the "only game in town" argument of CIA director Leon Panetta.

A month later, on March 25, 2010, the use of drones received a massive boost from an important legal source. Harold Hongju Koh, the State Department's top lawyer spoke at length at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law about drones. His conclusion (not unlike the many conclusions drawn by his predecessors in the Bush Administration), was that the state of war the US finds itself in, validates its choices of instrument. The irony of course is that Koh was one of the most vociferous critics of the Bush Administration's do-anything-to-seem-to-win approach to the war on terror.

On April 2, 2010 Micah Zenko of the Council on Foreign Relations, and one of the few voices in recent months to question the official US military and CIA policy on drones, argued in the Washington Times that the US government must cease to pretend that the drone strikes are secret. He calls out the US to openly defend drone strikes, if it is confident in statements like the one made by a senior Obama administration official, whom he quotes as saying "If there are Predator operations in Pakistan, I would argue that the collateral damage is negligible at most, and that reports of intensified damage are a myth."

On April 4, 2010 Pir Zubair Shah and Jane Perlez filed a story for the New York Times that helped propagate the view that drones don't kill many civilians, and are excellent at killing terrorists. Titled, "Drones Batter Al Qaeda and Its Allies Within Pakistan", the story was an advertisement for the use of drones as an effective tool in the war.

On April 25, 2010, Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann published yet another op-ed, this time, entitled "No

CHOOSE
A CHILD
TO HELP BY
COUNTRY

Kenya

REPLAY

Choose a country

World Vision
www.worldvision.org

Secrets in the Sky" that urges both the US and Pakistan to acknowledge and own the drone strikes.

Interestingly, once again, changing the duration of time being observed, Bergen and Tiedemann lower the civilian casualty percentage once again, writing, "A survey we have made of reliable press accounts indicates that since January 2009, the reported strikes have killed at least 520 people, of whom around 410 were described as militants, suggesting that the civilian death rate is about 20 per cent."

There is only one conclusive fact to derive from the substantial disagreements about the number of innocent civilian casualties from drones. They do exist in substantial numbers.

The third fact, and the most problematic, in terms of policy, is that drone attacks have been the most effective instrument in beheading the organizations capacities of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Pakistan's Fata.

Baitullah Mehsud is the most high-profile target of the drones for Pakistanis. But long-time followers of global counter-terrorism know that drones have helped destroy the operational capacity of Al-Qaeda gradually, since 2004. This effectiveness is an argument that, for many Americans, civilians and officials, trumps all considerations. The suggestion that this holds true for Pakistani officials military and political alike is not beyond the realm of the possible.

This is where Pakistan is its own worst enemy. It is perfectly legitimate for Pakistanis to have an emotional position about the drones. It is not however, so legitimate for Pakistani government officials to use the drones as a negotiating tool with the US government. If there is a compelling Pakistani national security argument in favour of the drones, then the Pakistani people deserve to hear it. Of course, my money is on the fact that there isn't. If there was, that argument would already have been made.


The Pakistani national security paradigm continues to be defined by opacity, blunt force and the absence of procedural political ownership through parliament. Without fixing our country's main root of dysfunction, rooting out terrorism is a pipe dream. The United States' insistence on opening a North Waziristan front, and expanding the drone war cannot solve that main root of dysfunction. Only the political process can.


—Concluded


Like 3 people like this.


Recommendations


[Login](#) You need to be logged into Facebook to see your friends' recommendations

 **Celebrating Peshawar**
296 people shared this.

 **The real Hazara problem**
215 people shared this.

 **PM campaigns for fake degree holder**
33 people shared this.

 **A house full at drive-in cinema**
54 people shared this.

 **Saudi academy to offer PhD in dreaming**
Facebook people shared this.

    ShareThis

[Back](#) | [Send this story to Friend](#) | [Print Version](#)

Google

Web www.thenews.com.pk

MAKING THE WORLD A GREENER PLACE
JOIN IN PLEDGING TO DO ONE THING THAT'S GREEN

[Let's go](#)

jetBlue
Jetting To Green

Swire's award ends June 22. No purchase necessary. Restrictions apply. Official rules at jetblue.com/awards

[The News Home](#) | [Jang Group Online](#) | [Jang Multimedia](#) | [Jang Searchable](#) | [Ad Tariff / Enquiry](#) | [Editor Internet](#) | [Webmaster](#)