

Often unreported by the Western media, strikes against suspected terrorist sites in Pakistan from unmanned aerial vehicles are a regular occurrence. But this is not a cost-free option, as the suicide bombing that killed 7 CIA operatives showed - and that incident can be linked directly back to networks hit repeatedly in Pakistan.

Many of the strikes are chronicled by our friends at The Long War Journal. Their analysis shows that casualty levels have risen drastically over the last 3 years: 73 Taliban/ Al Qaeda in 2007; 286 Taliban/Al Qaeda and 31 civilians in 2008; 404 Taliban/ Al Qaeda and 43 civilians up to the end of September. Almost all of these took place in the tribal agencies of North and South Waziristan.

The purpose of these strikes (many of which are unacknowledged or revealed in Pakistan when "civilians" are killed) is to disrupt Al Qaeda networks and Taliban operations in Afghanistan, plus Pakistani Taliban leaders who threaten that state. It should also be noted that more than 70% of US and NATO supplies pass through Pakistan's north-west provinces.

Amongst the successes claimed in 2009 are the deaths of senior figures such as:

- ♦ Ilyas Kashmiri ♦ The operations commander of the Harakat-ul-Jihad-Islami and the operations chief of Brigade 313. Date killed: September 14, 2009
- ♦ Najmuddin Jalolov ♦ The leader of the Islamic Jihad Group, a breakaway faction of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Najmuddin was closely allied with al Qaeda. Date killed: September 14, 2009
- ♦ Maulvi Ismail Khan ♦ A military commander in the Haqqani Network. Date killed: September 8, 2009
- ♦ Mustafa al Jaziri ♦ A senior military commander for al Qaeda who sits on al Qaeda's military shura. Date killed: September 7, 2009
- ♦ Baitullah Mehsud ♦ The overall leader of the movement of the Taliban in Pakistan. Date killed: August 5, 2009
- ♦ Kifayatullah Anikhel ♦ A Taliban commander under Baitullah Mehsud. Date killed: July 7, 2009
- ♦ Mufti Noor Wali ♦ Suicide bomber trainer for the Taliban and al Qaeda. Date killed: July 3, 2009
- ♦ Khwaz Ali Mehsud ♦ A senior deputy to Baitullah Mehsud. Date killed: June 23, 2009
- ♦ Abdullah Hamas al Filistini ♦ A senior al Qaeda trainer. Date killed: April 1, 2009
- ♦ Osama al Kini (aka Fahid Mohammed Ally Msalam) ♦ Al Qaeda's operations chief for Pakistan who was wanted for the 1998 bombings against the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Date killed: January 1, 2009
- ♦ Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan ♦ A senior aide to Osama al Kini who was wanted for the 1998 bombings against the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Date killed: January 1, 2009

UAV strikes hotted up in December, but the month ended with some of the targets striking back with a grievous blow against the CIA. On December 8th, 2 Hellfire missiles from a UAV (usually Predator or Reaper) hit a car in a village 7 miles south east of Miranshah in North Waziristan (NW). A Pakistani security official claimed three Taliban/Al Qaeda were killed and three injured.

The region is a stronghold of the Haqqani Network. This was the first strike in December following 2 in November and 2 in October. Subsequently it was claimed 2 of the men were from Saudi Arabi, and Saleh Al Somali of Al Qaeda's external operation branch.

Two days later, the first UAV strike since the Pakistani Army Offensive took place in South Waziristan (SW). Six Taliban/ Al Qaeda operatives were unofficially reported killed after a strike on a "hideout" in Tanga in the Ladha region, where 7 strikes in all took place last year.

On 17th December 2 strikes were reported to have killed 18 in the Datta Khel region of NW. In the first, a Hellfire was reported to have killed two in a vehicle. The second, against a cave complex, compound and vehicle was by up to 10 Hellfires fired from half a dozen UAVs. 17 were reported dead, included 7 "foreigners", usually code for Al Qaeda. One was said to be Zuhaib Al Zahabi, a commander in Al Qaeda's Shadow Army (Lashkar al Zil). Osama BinLaden's brother in law Sheikh Saeed al Saudi, was the reported target but is believed to have survived. The following day a "Taliban safe house" or

training camp in NW was hit by several Hellfire missiles with a reported 8 Punjabi Taliban killed.

Over Christmas, 2 Hellfire missiles launched into the Saidgai region of NW were reported to have killed 4 and injured 2. A Taliban "safe house" was targeted on 31st December by 2 Hellfire missiles. It was in the town of Machi Khel near Mir Ali in NW, and 4 were reported dead and two injured. The town is a stronghold of Abu Kasha al Iraqi (Abu Akash) and Al Qaeda leader responsible for liaison with the Taliban. The family of Haji Omar Khan, a senior Taliban leader in SW, later said he had been killed along with a son of Karim Khan, a Tribal leader. And just a day later, on 1st January 3 Taliban fighters were reported killed in a second strike, this time in a vehicle in the town of Ghundikala in the Mir Ali region.

Hellfire strikes from UAVs are continuing against targets in NW and SW. However, the death of 7 CIA personnel in the bombing incident may slow down the flow of target identification. A CBS report said that a "double agent" from the Haqqani Network was responsible. Haqqani had been repeatedly targeted by UAVs, as described above.

For a more detailed analysis see -
http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/10/analysis_us_airstrik.php#ixzz0bdM5uNEi