

Drone Wars November - December 2012 by Elayne Jude, Great North News Service

November 2012 saw a lull in strikes, with one strike in Yemen near the beginning of the month, and one in Pakistan near the end. The tempo increased in both regions throughout December, and the close of the year saw a cluster of killings in Yemen. Also in December, Iran TV accused Israel and Azerbaijan of jointly operating drones to spy in Iranian airspace. An Azeri government spokesman denied the allegations.

November 7 - Yemen. Three 'militants' killed near Sana'a, including AQAP leader. In a late night strike on a moving vehicle near the Yemeni capital, Adnan al Qadhi, an AQAP commander and two of his bodyguards, Rabiee Lahib and Radwan al Hashidi, were confirmed killed. Al Qadhi was wanted for the attack on the US Embassy in Sana'a on September 17, 2008. More than 16 people were killed after terrorists detonated multiple bombs followed by a ground attack. Terrorist snipers dressed in Yemeni military uniforms added to the confusion in the attempt on the Embassy compound. The exact location of the strike is described variously as near the village of Sayyan, about 25 miles outside of Sana'a, and near the village of Beit al Ahmar, about nine miles from the capital. The strike is the first in this area, and follows the attack on October 28 in the north of the country, establishing a new front for the drones in Yemen. Previous drone activity has been confined, since the 2009 escalation, to the south.

November 29 - South Waziristan. Three 'militants,' killed in the first strike recorded in Pakistan this month. Several missiles were fired at a compound in the village of Shin Warzak. A vehicle was targeted and three people killed, including 'foreigners', a term often used to describe Arab AQ, or members of regional terror groups outside of Pakistan. One of the dead was later identified as Sheikh Abdul Bari, a mid-level AQ commander. Today's attack ends a 36-day-long hiatus in the strike campaign in Pakistan's tribal areas. An intelligence official said that the lull 'certainly wasn't due to a lack of targets.' The last strike took place on Oct. 24, when four "militants" and one civilian were killed in an attack on a compound in North Waziristan. The longest pause in strikes was 55 days, from Nov. 26, 2011, to Jan. 10, 2012, when the Obama administration suspended the program on after Pakistani troops attacked US forces on the Afghan side of the border. 24 Pakistani soldiers died in the fighting. The US later apologised for the incident.

December 1 - South Waziristan. Three 'militants' killed including a Yemeni al Qaeda commander. Missiles were fired at a car traveling in Shin Warzak near Wana in South Waziristan. The AQ leader was tentatively identified as Abdul Rehman al Zaman Yemeni. A US military intelligence official who tracks al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan said that Abdul Rehman was a "mid-level al Qaeda commander, equivalent to a colonel." The strike is the second in Shin Warzak in three days.

December 6 - North Waziristan. Three 'militants' killed at a compound in the village of Mubarak

Shah near Mir Ali. Missiles were fired at a compound. "Militants were using this house as a compound," a Pakistani intelligence official told AFP. "At least three militants were killed in this drone strike." The target of the strike was not disclosed. No senior leaders from the Taliban, al Qaeda, or any other regional terror groups were reported killed at the time. .A Kuwaiti, Khalid bin Abdul Rahman al Husainan, who is also known as a Abu Zeid al Kuwaiti a prominent member of AQ's religious committee, was later named by two colleagues as one of those killed. Al Husainan was a former imam in the Kuwaiti Endowments Ministry who "has appeared in dozens of as Sahab videos since August 2009, some lecturing on jihad and others speaking on Islam in general," according to the SITE Intelligence Group.

December 9 - North Waziristan. One 'militant' and three members of his family killed near Miramshah. Several missiles were fired at a compound in the village of Tapi, according to Reuters. An al Qaeda commander known as Mohammad Ahmed al Mansoor and three of his family members were killed. Al Mansoor was a midlevel al Qaeda commander, according to US intelligence officials. One official said that Al Mansoor was "one of many Pakistanis who are filling out leadership positions in al Qaeda." Two other senior Pakistani al Qaeda leaders have been killed in US drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas so far this year. Al Mansoor is the fourth senior al Qaeda commander reported killed in four drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas since Nov. 29.

December 9 - Iran. Iranian Press TV accused Azerbaijan and Israel of joint spying missions over Iran's shared border with Karabakh; that Israeli military advisers were active in Azerbaijan; and that Israeli-made Hermes-450 drones, as well as the Orbiter Mini System, were used to conduct aerial surveillance missions over Iranian territory. Azerbaijan has acquired 10 Hermes-450 drones,, and reportedly has five Heron TP-II and five Searcher UAVs, acquired through a \$1.6 billion contract with Israel. Israel and Azerbaijan both denied the allegations. Following the disclosure by the Sunday Times, an Azeri Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated: "Azerbaijan's position has been voiced several times. Baku will never allow its territory be used against neighbours."

December 21 - North Waziristan. Four 'militants' killed near Mir Ali. A compound in the village of Hisokhel near Mir Ali in North Waziristan was struck. The house was destroyed and four were reported to have been killed. "Some foreigners" are believed to have been in the compound at the time.

December 24 - Yemen. Seven 'militants' killed in two strikes. A Yemeni and a Jordanian AQAP operative are reported killed after several missiles were fired at their vehicle as they traveled in the Manaseeh area of Baydah province in central Yemen. Three more "militants" are said to have been wounded. The Yemeni was identified as Abdullah Hussein al Waeli, from Marib province, who was wanted after escaping from prison in 2010. In a second strike in the eastern province of Hadramout, four AQAP fighters were killed as they rode motorcycles in the town of Shehr. The identity of those killed have not been disclosed; no senior AQAP leaders are reported to have been killed. Jordanians are known to fight in Yemen as members of AQAP. Two Jordanian operatives, including a cousin of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, are reported to have been killed in strikes in Yemen in 2012. On Sept. 2, the US killed 13 civilians in this area while targeting AQAP.

December 28 - North Wazirsistan. Five "militants" are said to have been killed in the Shawal Valley. Two missiles were fired at a compound in the village of Gurbaz. No civilians are reported to have been killed. The exact target of the strike has not been disclosed. No senior al Qaeda or allied jihadist commanders from foreign terrorist groups are reported to have been killed in the strike. So far in 2012, 10 of the 45 drone strikes in Pakistan, or 22%, have hit targets in the Shawal Valley. At one point in summer, seven of 10 strikes took place in the Shawal Valley.

December 28 - Yemen. Two AQAP killed in the third strike in Yemen in five days. Missiles were fired at a group of fighters as they travelled on motorcycles in the town of Shehr, in Hadramout province. Today's is the second attack in Shehr in five days. On Dec. 24, five AQAP fighters were targeted as they also rode motorcycles in the town. Two were later identified as Abdullah Bawazir and Nabil al Kaldi. Both men had escaped from a prison in Mukallah, in Hadramout, in June 2011. Hadramout is the ancestral home of Osama bin Laden's family, and the province has become an AQAP bastion over the past several years. Prior to May 2012, there were zero US drone strikes in Hadramout. Since mid-May, seven attacks the 41 drone strikes in Yemen this year, or 17%, have taken place there. The Yemeni military claimed that Said al Shihri, AQAP's deputy emir and a former Guantanamo Bay detainee, was killed in a drone strike in Hadramout on Sept. 5. Al Shihri denied the reports of his death.

December 29 - Yemen. Three AQAP killed in Baydah province. Missiles were fired at a group of fighters as they were travelling in Land Cruisers in the village of Manaseeh, outside the town of Rada'a, in central Baydah province. AQAP has increased its presence in Baydah province this year. On May 28, a drone strike targeted Kaid al Dhahab, AQAP's emir in the province of Baydah, and his brother Nabil, who is also a senior leader in the terror group, in an attack in the town of Rada'a. Kaid took control of AQAP in Baydah after his brother, Tariq, was killed in February by another brother, Hazam, a senior tribal leader in the town, who was concerned that Tariq's AQAP affiliation would incur the wrath of the Yemeni government. Kaid and Nabil, brothers-in-law of the slain AQAP leader and ideologue, Anwar al Awlaki, sought to regroup AQAP's forces in Baydah following Tariq's death.