

Drone Wars roundup for July/August 2014 is compiled by Elayne Jude for Great North News Service

In August, the US launched mixed UACV/conventional airstrikes against ISIS* in northern Iraq. Original objectives were to halt the so-called Islamic State's advance on Irbil, protecting US personnel based there, and to provide humanitarian relief to the Yazidi minority trapped on Mount Sinjar. Within a week, the US air force was assisting Kurdish and Iraqi forces "to protect critical infrastructure" and "support Iraqi security forces and Kurdish defence forces... to combat ISIL [ISIS]." By the end of August, the US was launching strikes against ISIS fighters besieging the town of Amerli, in Salahaddin province, unrelated to US personnel in Irbil, and devoid of critical infrastructure. The administration is widely reported to be considering strikes in Syria against ISIS bases there

The sole training centre and first operational squadron, VUP-19, for the US Navy's new MQ-4C Triton unmanned aerial system will be located at Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Florida, which is quickly becoming home to much of the US Navy's most advanced technology. The 31,000-square-foot, \$15.9 million mission control centre, currently under construction, will ultimately house a reconnaissance intelligence hub with near-global coverage.

The Washington Post reported 18 August that the Yemeni government paid more than \$1 million to the families of those killed or injured in a strike last year. The Post has seen new details demonstrating that civilians unconnected to al-Qaeda were among the casualties. Record payouts have been made as compensation for the strike, which hit vehicles in a wedding party and prompted a suspension of the U.S. military's UACV campaign. The payout exceeds the total amount distributed by the U.S. military for errant strikes in Afghanistan over an entire year.

A new report of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters contains a number of recommendations related to both autonomous weapons and current uses of armed drones: "the Secretary-General should commission a study to examine the distinction between armed/military drones and unarmed/peaceful/civilian drones, and such ideas as improving transparency in targeted unmanned aerial vehicle strikes as a confidence-building measure and developing a robust oversight and accountability mechanisms for targeted strikes outside active battlefields. The proposed study should also consider international humanitarian law and how relevant principles such as distinction, proportionality and military necessity should be applied, with a view to avoiding excessive injurious or indiscriminate effects;

The Secretary-General should encourage Member States to take into account their responsibility and obligation to the wider international community when using emerging technologies, given the absence of international regulation in that field."

Strikes continue elsewhere

10 July - North Waziristan. Six fighters killed in first strike on the tribal agencies in over three weeks. The strike coincided with a Pakistani military offensive in the region, Operation .

Missiles struck a compound and a vehicle in the village of Doga Mada Khel, in the Datta Khel area of North Waziristan, site of an AQ command and control centre. The identities of the dead were not disclosed. No senior jihadist leaders or operatives have been reported killed.

The Datta Khel area is administered by Hafiz Gul Bahadar, the Taliban commander for North Waziristan, and is a locus of Taliban, Haqqani Network, and AQ activity. The Lashkar al Zil, A'Qs Shadow Army, is known to operate a command centre in Datta Khel. Some of al Qaeda's top leaders have been killed in strikes in Datta Khel.

Three of the six were later identified by Sanafi al Nasr, head of AQ "Victory Committee." Nasr tweeted on July 14 on the "Martyrdom of six of the dearest comrades of the path in Khorasan, among them my brother and loved one and apple of my eye Taj al Makki and my brother the kind and generous Abu Abdurahman al Kuwaiti yesterday in a bombardment of spies". Nasr identified the third

operative as Fayez Awda al Khalidi. He did not name the three others.

Little is publicly known about Makki, Kuwaiti, and Khalidi. Makki, a Saud, and Kuwaiti are mid-level commanders.

16 July - North Waziristan. 18 suspected militants killed in another strike on the Datta Khel area of the tribal agency. The exact target of the strike was not disclosed. No senior al Qaeda or Taliban fighters are reported to have been killed.

At least four missiles were fired at a compound and a vehicle in the village of Saidgai. The compound was razed and 18 were killed, according to Pakistani sources. The New York Times reported that 20 people, "including 12 foreigners of Central Asian origin and eight local militants," were killed. The Central Asians may have been members of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan or the Turkistan Islamic Party.

19 July - North Waziristan. 11 "militants" killed in Datta Khel.

Eight missiles were fired at a compound in the village of Doga Mada Khel in the tribal agency in the early morning.

Two commanders from the Punjabi Taliban are said to have been killed, but their names were not disclosed by Pakistani officials. The Punjabi Taliban, whose leader, Asmatullah Muawiya, also serves as an AQ commander, has been amenable to peace talks with the Pakistani government.

6 August - North Waziristan. Five 'militants' killed, including several "foreigners," (AQ and other non-Pakistani jihadists) in the first strike in Pakistan in three weeks.

A pair of missiles struck a compound in the Datta Khel area of North Waziristan. Two other jihadists were wounded in the strike. Most of the dead were not Pakistani nationals.

The exact target of the strike was not disclosed. No senior jihadist leaders or commanders are reported killed in the strike.

Today's is the fourth strike in Datta Khel since July 6. The last four strikes in Pakistan have all taken place in that area.

8 August - Northern Iraq. U.S. drones (and FA-18s) repeatedly bombed what officials described as ISIS artillery units and convoys advancing on the Kurdish regional capital of Irbil.

The strikes began several hours after President Obama authorised "targeted airstrikes," saying in a televised address that the United States had an obligation to protect its personnel in Iraq and prevent a potential genocide of minority groups by ISIS.

9 August - Northern Iraq. The US Department of Defense confirmed that armoured personnel carriers and other vehicles belonging to the Islamic State were targeted by a "mix of US fighters and remotely piloted aircraft" in four separate airstrikes near Sinjar.

The first strike destroyed one of two IS APCs firing on Yazidi civilians near Sinjar. The second destroyed the surviving APC along with one other and an armed truck nearby. In the third strike, yet another APC was identified and destroyed by US aircraft. The Department of Defense did not elaborate on the the fourth.

9 August - Yemen. Three dead in first recorded strike in Yemen in nearly two months, The suspected AQ fighters were killed in the central province of Marib, as AQAP clashes with Yemeni forces for control of the Hadramout province in the East.

A compound was targeted in the Wadi Abida area. The names of the three suspected fighters were not disclosed.

The Wadi Abida of Marib province is thought to be a haven for AQAP in central Yemen.

12 August - Northern Iraq. The U.S. Central Command issued a brief statement confirming that a strike targeted a mortar position firing on members of the Kurdish militia. The Kurds were defending civilians attempting to evacuate the Sinjar area.

13 August - Northern Iraq. The U.S. Central Command confirmed in a brief statement that a strike destroyed an armed truck operated by Islamic militants west of the village of Sinjar. The truck was located close to a checkpoint operated by fighters of the Islamic State.

17 August - Yemen. Three suspected AQAP fighters killed in the second strike by the US in Yemen in a week.

The three armed men were apparently travelling in a vehicle along a desert stretch between Yemen and the Saudi Arabian border when two rockets struck them. No senior

AQAP leaders or operatives are reported to have been killed in the drone strike. AQAP has not released a statement concerning the strike.

* Defence Viewpoints current editorial policy is to refer to ISIS/ISIL/IS/AQI/Daesh/QSIS as ISIS since its claim to being a state is not recognised internationally.