

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/09/25/obama_doctrine_drones

The Obama doctrine: Drones and just wars

By Meg Braun

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

Less than half of Americans approve of Obama's job as president. According to Gallup's most recent poll, his job approval rating is **49 percent**. However, there is one area where President Obama gets high marks: drone warfare. In June the **Pew Research Center** reported that 62 percent of Americans approve of the President's use of drone strikes.

Targeted killings by drones were first introduced under President Bush in 2002 when a Hellfire missile slammed into a Jeep in Yemen, killing **Qaed Senyan al-Harithi**, a key conspirator in the 2000 attack on the USS Cole. And yet it is President Obama who has consistently made headlines for authorizing hundreds of attacks in Pakistan, and recently dozens more in Yemen. According to a recent **CNN article** based on data compiled by the New America Foundation, President Obama has carried out six times more strike during his first term than Bush did during his entire eight years in office.

On its face these numbers would seem to suggest that President Obama is the more aggressive commander-in-chief, that he is uniquely unencumbered by concerns for Pakistani sovereignty, a stronger proponent of drone warfare and disproportionately committed to killing al-Qaeda

members. However, analyzing Obama's drone policy in isolation from larger geopolitical issues, obscures that which is truly radical about his foreign policy.

The rate of drone strikes was already increasing exponentially when Obama took office. He continued that trend and made the politically unpopular decision to give Afghanistan the resources he thought it deserved, while using drones to deny terrorists safe haven in Pakistan and targeting al-Qaeda and Taliban rank and file rather than just their commanders.

During his tenure, George W. Bush did not fail to use drones effectively; rather he was preoccupied with Saddam Hussein. From 2002 to 2008, the Bush administration devoted a preponderance of the United States' military assets, political capital and administrative attention to Iraq. In 2005, the Air Force had just two Predator drones monitoring the whole of Afghanistan, a country the size of Texas, to say nothing of resources in Pakistan. It was not until the summer of 2008, seven long years after 9/11, that they began to shift their focus back to al-Qaeda and the Taliban. From January to June 2008 U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan nearly doubled, going from **26,000 to 48,000**.

At the same time, the Bush administration made a critical decision to stop requesting Pakistani authorization prior to each strike. With a new government taking over in Pakistan and a renewed sense of urgency brought about by a Presidency quickly coming to a close, the White House seized the opportunity to re-write the diplomatic rules of the Predator program. The impact was immediate. During the first half of 2008 Bush authorized a modest five drone strikes. In his last six months he approved 31. Had he served a third term, we can reasonably expect, based on this trend, he might have carried out 62 strikes a year, if not more. Obama's annual average is 75.

This shift was facilitated not just by domestic factors, but by a fundamental change in Pakistan. Just as Bush and the U.S. military were pivoting their attention back to Afghanistan, domestic security in Pakistan was deteriorating. In December of 2007 Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan and then opposition party leader was assassinated in a combined sniper and suicide bomb attack. Bhutto's death was just one of many. Prior to 2007, there were less than ten suicide attacks a year, however, according to the **Pakistan Institute for Peace**, by 2009 there were 87 suicide attacks and 2,586 terrorist, insurgent and sectarian related incidents of terrorism. Afghanistan succumbing to a Taliban coup would be tragic, but in Pakistan, a country with over

100 nuclear warheads, it would be catastrophic. Thus domestic terrorism and political insecurity presumably made the Pakistanis more hospitable to drone strikes, while making intervention an American imperative.

From the outset of his presidency Obama identified Afghanistan as not only a **just war**, but a strategic necessity. Within a month of entering office, President Obama announced the deployment of **17,000 additional troops** to Afghanistan and within a year he announced a surge of 30,000 more. Shortly after the reinforcements arrived, in September of 2010, the military launched a major offensive in Kandahar province. Drone strikes in Pakistan immediately skyrocketed from an average of 7 per month to 24 in September. This remains the deadliest month on drone record, with approximately 140 militants reported killed and **zero reported civilian deaths**.

This aggressive pursuit is a marked difference from Bush's Battle of Tora Bora, during which bin Laden and dozens of his followers escaped into Pakistan.

While Bush sought to decapitate the leadership ranks of al-Qaeda, Obama has sought to cut their legs out from under them, destroying the foot soldiers, rather than just the officers. According to data compiled by the **New America Foundation**, while a third of all strikes by President Bush killed a militant leader, under President Obama, that number has fallen to 13 percent and leaders account for only 2 percent of all total drone related fatalities.

However a war of militant attrition is not without advantages. Drone attacks based on patterns of activity rather than individual identity have decimated the ranks of low-level combatants, forcing would-be terrorists to look to their own survival rather than plotting the next attack. The omnipresent threat of a missile strike has restricted freedom of movement, impeded communication and destroyed dozens of training camps.

Under Obama drones have not only been a tactic to hunt terrorists leaders, they are also a tool for preventing spillover into Pakistan at a minimum cost of U.S. blood and treasure, and, despite some civilian casualties, with minimal disruption to the state of Pakistan.

Finally, there is also evidence to suggest that many of the attacks were designed to appease Pakistan, in that drones have pursued Taliban leaders who were more threatening to Pakistan than to the United States. In the first eight months of 2009 the United States carried out 32 drone

strikes, 19 of which targeted **Baitullah Mehsud**, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban and alleged mastermind behind the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Thus some portion of the increased targeting of the Taliban may simply reflect the costs of doing business.

What Obama deserves to be lauded for is not increasing drones strikes, but rather a willingness to give Afghanistan the attention and resources it deserved while confronting the spread of violence in Pakistan. Facts on the ground indicate that the drone program has been an operational success. Under Obama's watch drone strikes in Pakistan have killed **1,332 to 2,326 combatants** and the number of **monthly terrorist attacks in Pakistan** has fallen by over 50 percent since the high in 2008.

The question is not whether the next administration, be it a Romney or Obama one, will continue to use drones. The question is whether drones have reached the limits of their tactical utility. The core of al-Qaeda is in disarray and drone firepower had begun to focus on regional affiliates in **Yemen**, Somalia and beyond. However, killing militants will not cure the world of terrorism, it can only help to restrain it. The solution lies in committing the diplomatic and financial resources to address the political and economic instability upon which Islamic extremism feeds. A truly courageous commander-in-chief must know when to prioritize statecraft over armed force.