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## Surge in US assassination drone attacks tied to Afghan pullout

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The strikes are seen as a way to weaken adversaries of the Afghan government before the withdrawal and serve notice that the United States will still be able to launch attacks.”

The recent major surge in US assassination drone strikes in Pakistan by American CIA spy agency has been linked to an Obama administration decision to reveal plans for withdrawing most of its forces from neighboring Afghanistan.

Quoting “current and former US intelligence officials,” influential US daily *Washington Post* attributes the hike in terror drone attacks to “a sense of urgency surrounding expectations that President Obama will soon order a drawdown that could leave Afghanistan with fewer than 6,000 US troops after 2014” in an article published on Friday.

“The strikes are seen as a way to weaken adversaries of the Afghan government before the withdrawal and serve notice that the United States will still be able to launch attacks,” the article contends, citing unnamed intelligence officials.

***According to the report, an assassination drone strike in Pakistan’s North Waziristan border region on Thursday was the seventh in 10 days, “marking a major escalation in the pace of attacks.”***

The report further reiterates that the series of recent targeted “CIA strikes” are a likely “signal” to militant groups “that the US will still present a threat” after most American-led forces are withdrawn from Afghanistan, quoting “counterterrorism expert” Seth Jones of prominent think tank Rand Corporation, which mainly conducts research studies for the US government.

“With the drawdown in U.S. forces, the drone may be, over time, the most important weapon against militant groups,” Jones is further quoted as saying.

According to the report, US officials have further tied the hike in CIA’s assassination drone attacks to “recent intelligence gains on groups blamed for lethal attacks on US and coalition forces in Afghanistan.”

***The daily also states that CIA has begun preparing plans to trim back “its network of bases” across Afghanistan “to five from 15 or more because of the difficulty of providing security for its outposts after most US forces have left” the country, citing a former “intelligence official with extensive experience in Afghanistan.”***

“As the military pulls back, the agency has to pull back,” the former US intelligence official is further quoted as saying on the condition of anonymity, “particularly from high-risk outposts along the country’s eastern border that have served as bases for running informant networks and gathering intelligence on al-Qaeda and Taliban strongholds in Pakistan.”

According to the article, CIA’s plans to reduce the number of its bases in Afghanistan are among a wide range of topics that American officials have been negotiating with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who is meeting with top US authorities in Washington this week.

A CIA spokesman, the daily notes, declined to say whether agency officials had met with Karzai.