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## Drone strikes lead to disaster in Pakistan

by Misbah Saba Malik

In the year 2010, the United States has launched the greatest number of air strikes from unmanned aerial drones into the inaccessible tribal regions of northwest Pakistan, killing many people including suspected militants and innocent civilians.

During the year, a total of 995 people had been killed in 122 drone strikes launched in northwestern tribal agencies of Pakistan, as compared to 53 drone strikes in 2009 which killed almost 500 people.

The number of air strikes doubled this year than the previous one, and the figure of people killed in these strikes also raised to double, which shows the growing U.S. influences in Pakistan's territory.

A total of 218 strikes have been launched within the territory of Pakistan from 2004 to 2010, and approximately 1,378 to 2,109 individuals have been killed in these unprecedented attacks.

People killed in drone strikes are usually identified as militants or suspected militants by U.S. officials and Pakistani security forces. But the real fact always remains distant and far behind. There is never any details of the names of people killed in such aerial strikes on media, nor are their identities confirmed or faces shown. Their exact account always remains vague.

Besides these militants, a large number of innocent civilians also became the victim of the drone strikes aimed for militants. They raised their voice in protest but most of the times it all goes in vain.

On Dec. 9, unfortunate relatives of the victims of drone attacks staged a protest in front of the Parliament House in Pakistan's capital Islamabad.

Talking to Xinhua, most of them said that they lost their loved ones in drone strikes including women, children and students. They appealed to the world community for taking notice of the ferocious act of target killing carried out by drones.

Some of them also said that they managed to survive the injuries which they had in drone attacks. However, they became disabled and incapable of earning bread and butter for their families.

People of Pakistan and opposition parties in the parliament have repeatedly protested against these attacks as they are an infringement of the sovereignty of the country. Civilian deaths including women and children further angered the people and raised anti-America feelings in them.

Apparently these drone strikes are launched to root out militant's safe havens in northwestern Pakistan and to eradicate the main irritants of the war against terror. But despite the sharp rise in drone strikes over the past year and a half, Pakistan still faces extraordinary levels of terrorist violence.

The Taliban and its allies repeatedly carry out suicide attacks and complex assaults on secure military, government and civilian targets with regularity.

This fact puts a huge question mark on the reason of continuity of drone strikes in the region. According to official statistics, these drone strikes have successfully killed a significant number of militant leaders and foot soldiers, but these losses are clearly being absorbed due to which suicide bombing and other militant assaults are still going on in the country with the similar pace.

Some local and international experts are also of the view that it may take 15 more years for the eradication of militancy and suicidal attacks from Pakistan. This prediction further negates the role of aerial strikes from pilot-less planes.

The U.S. drones launch strikes into the Federally Administrated Tribal Area (FATA) of Pakistan. According to critics, however, it is against international law to use the air space of an independent country for vested interests.

To clear this allegation, U.S. State Department legal advisor Harold Koh stated on March 25 that the drone strikes were legal because of the right to self-defense. He said that the U.S. is involved in an armed conflict with al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and their affiliates and therefore may use force consistent with self- defense under international law.

On June 2, the United Nations Human Rights Council investigator Philip Alston's team released a report on its investigation into the drone strikes, criticizing the United States for being "the most prolific user of targeted killings" in the world.

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, in his address to a gathering, also said that the drone attacks have caused a great damage to Pakistan. The government of Pakistan has repeatedly asked the U.S. to transfer drone technology to them but to no avail.

The repeated drone attacks in Pakistan's territory has taken the form of a war, which is rather one-sided. The victims do not have the technology to fight drones or even to defend themselves from the aerial strikes.

Pakistani analysts believe they can do no harm to America, but they raise havoc within the territory of Pakistan by triggering revenge suicidal attacks to kill thousands of innocent civilians every year. The spokespersons of Taliban justifies themselves for these heinous acts.

They say the mass killing of civilians is the only way for them to exert pressure on the government of Pakistan and to compel it for taking useful measures for the stoppage of drone attacks on the Pakistani soil.