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Associated Press

## Pakistani officials: US missiles kill 54 in NW

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PESHAWAR, Pakistan – Three American missile attacks killed 54 alleged militants Friday close to the Afghan border, an unusually high number of victims that included commanders of a Taliban-allied group that were holding a meeting, Pakistani officials said.

The attacks took place in the Khyber tribal region, which has been rarely struck by American missiles before over the last three years. That could indicate a possible expansion of the CIA-led covert campaign of drone strikes inside Pakistani territory.

The first strike targeted two vehicles in the Sandana area of the Tirah Valley, killing seven militants and wounding another nine. The men were believed to belong to the Pakistani Taliban, one of the country's largest and deadliest insurgent groups.

Later, missiles hit a compound in Speen Darang village where the Lashkar-e-Islam, a Taliban affiliate known to be strong in Khyber, were meeting, killing 32 people, among

them commanders. The third strike took place in Narai Baba village and killed 15 militants, the officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

U.S. officials do not acknowledge firing the missiles, much less comment on who they are targeting. It is impossible to independently report on the aftermath of the attacks because outsiders are not allowed to visit the tribal regions. Human rights groups say there are significant numbers of civilian casualties in the attacks.