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Up to 320 Civilians Killed in Pakistan Drone War: Report

By [Noah Shachtman](#) [✉](#) October 19, 2009 | 1:22 pm | Categories: [Af/Pak](#), [Drones](#)



How many civilians have been killed in the U.S. drone war in Pakistan? The number could be as high as 320 innocents, according to an [analysis](#) released today by the New America Foundation. That's about a third of the 1,000 or so people slain in the robotic aircraft attacks since 2006.

Reliable information from the drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas is incredibly hard to come by. The government not only keeps news organizations out, it also blocks aid groups, like Doctors Without Borders. So analysts are forced to rely only press reports, which are themselves relying on second-hand accounts. The result: wildly different estimates of who has died in the attacks. In April, the *News of Pakistan* claimed that Predator and Reaper attacks had [only killed 14 militants](#); the rest were bystanders. Last month, the *Long War Journal* estimated that [about 10 percent of the casualties were civilian](#). The New America study, lead by long-time terrorism researcher Peter Bergen, comes down somewhere in between.

CIA director Leon Panetta told an audience last May that the drones were "[the only game in town in terms of confronting or trying to disrupt the Al Qaeda leadership](#)." But the New America study contends that the terror group's chieftains make up just a tiny percentage of the unmanned aircraft's victims. "Since 2006, our analysis indicates, 82 U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan have killed between 750 and 1,000 people. [Among them were about 20 leaders of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and allied groups](#), all of whom have been killed since January 2008." The rest have been footsoldiers in the militant organizations, or civilians.

Perhaps the most frequent target of the drone strikes was Pakistani Taliban leader [Baitullah Mehsud](#). Since President Obama took office, 15 of the 41 reported attacks were specifically aimed at Mehsud. He was finally killed on August 5th, along with one of his wives and her father.

All of which leads Jane Mayer, the *New Yorker* reporter who revealed so much of what we know about the abusive treatment of detainees, to [take aim at the drone program](#). "The embrace of the Predator program has occurred with remarkably little public discussion, given that it represents a radical new and geographically unbounded use of state-sanctioned lethal force. And, because of the CIA program's secrecy, there is no visible system of accountability in place, despite the fact that the agency has killed many civilians inside a politically fragile, nuclear-armed country with which the U.S. is not at war," she writes in the magazine's current issue.

In July 2001... the U.S. denounced Israel's use of target killing against Palestinian terrorists... The

CIA, which had been chastened by past assassination scandals, refused to deploy the Predator for anything other than surveillance purposes... George Tenet, then the agency's director, argued that it would be a 'terrible mistake' for 'the Director of Central Intelligence to fire a weapon like this.'

...Seven years later, there is no longer any doubt that targeted killing has become official U.S. policy.

[Photo: Noah Shachtman; on target: [@AfPakChannel](#)]

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Posted by: Wolfgang523 | 10/19/09 | 2:10 pm

First, I am saddened whenever innocent civilians are killed in the cross fire when the terrorists are targeted. But, in the same vain as this article, how many innocent children, innocent women, innocent men - all whose sole purpose in life is to live peacefully, have been brutally murdered, butchered, and blown to pieces by the evil, satanic worshipping, lower than scum terrorists? By some accounts, up to trillions (hyperbole but in the same vain as this article) have been killed.

Yet, it seems no one gives a rat's arse about the demon hordes, like Hamas, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda doing the killing, bombings, blowing up airplanes, or flying civilian airplanes with innocent people into buildings also filled with innocent people.

Yet, when the U.S. inadvertently kills an innocent, usually because the demon terrorists are using them as throw-away shields, then the liberals and the liberal media crap all over themselves in attempting to be the first to denounce this brutality on the U.S.'s part.

Bunch of friggin hypocrites.

May the Predators and the real Americans piloting them continue with their mission to weed out and remove from the face of this planet all terrorists.

After all, one kills a rabid animal. The terrorists are nothing more than rabid animals.

Posted by: greywolf | 10/19/09 | 2:44 pm

So that means 2/3rds are scum sucking low life terrorists who desire to kill innocent Americans and other infidels. Sounds like a good program to me; keep it up.

Posted by: McNulty | 10/19/09 | 3:40 pm

While I do support the current strategy in Pakistan, because its dirty work and quite frankly Pakistan isn't really trying as hard as they could be.

That being said this idea that drone strikes have some sort of surgical delicacy is a bit far fetched. Honestly in terms of collateral damage whats the difference between a drone strike and a car/suicide bomber? Yea if you pack a Land Rover full of semtex you'll probably have a bigger blast radius than a Hellfire but at the same time if your averaging a half dozen civies KIA per drone strike are you really going about things in a more righteous way than the suicide bombers?