



US missiles mow down 13 in Pakistan

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US drone attacks continue to claim lives in the Pakistani border area of North Waziristan amid Washington's failure to push Islamabad into major offensives on the area.

The surveillance aircraft on Saturday attacked the Saidgi village in the tribal area reportedly killing 13 people, AFP reported. The raid marked the third of such attacks over the past ten days.

Quoting a local intelligence official, CNN said the projectiles had hit a militant hideout and that the mortalities had all been militants.

Local Pakistani news outlets, however, said the missiles struck the "residential compound of" a local tribesman, Asmatullah.

Islamabad has launched major offensives in the neighboring South Waziristan as well as the other northwestern areas of Khyber and Swat under pressure from the US, whose large-scale military presence in Afghanistan is blamed to have sent the militants across the border into Pakistan.

The ongoing military hostilities in South Waziristan have prompted 80,000 people to flee the area. The United Nations has warned that 170,000 others could be rendered homeless during the battle that started in mid-October.

North Waziristan, which is yet to see such government action, has witnessed a rise in the US missile raids as the entire tribal belt is being allowed less and less of a respite from the drone attacks.

Since August 2008, at least 69 such strikes have killed about 663 people. Pakistani media outlets say civilians comprise a large part of the mortalities.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Tuesday condemned the attacks as "counterproductive and unhelpful in our joint efforts towards winning hearts and minds, which is essential to succeed against violent extremism."

Reports, however, allege that US drones take off from airbases located inside Pakistan's territory, pointing to suspected compromises on the part of Islamabad.

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