

Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. drones kill 8 in Pakistan's tribal region as strikes surge

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USPA News - At least eight suspected militants, including a senior al-Qaeda figure and a Pakistani Taliban commander, were killed Saturday when the United States carried out two more airstrikes in Pakistan's volatile tribal region, raising to at least 36 the number of people killed in a flurry of American drone strikes. The first of Saturday's airstrikes occurred in the afternoon when an unmanned U.S. drone fired missiles at a militant compound in Tirah Valley, located in Khyber Agency of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

The strike occurred right on the disputed border and it was unclear whether the compound was on the Afghan or Pakistani side. Pakistani intelligence officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said four bodies were recovered at the scene of the drone strike in Tirah Valley, which destroyed parts of the militant compound. Two other people - also said to be militants - were injured but their conditions were not known, they added. Usama Mahmood, a spokesman for al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), told Pakistan's Express Tribune newspaper that a senior member of the al-Qaeda branch was among those killed in Tirah Valley. The report identified the dead militant as Sheikh Imran Ali Siddiqi, who also went by the name Haji Shaikh Waliullah. A second airstrike occurred hours later when a U.S. drone fired two missiles at a vehicle carrying suspected militants in the Margha area of Shawal tehsil, located in Pakistan's volatile North Waziristan tribal area. Intelligence officials said four people, including foreigners, were killed in the attack while a fifth person was injured. The Tribune Express, citing an unidentified Pakistani government official, said a senior Pakistani Taliban commander known as Muhammad Mustafa was among those killed in the drone strike, which left the vehicle engulfed in flames. A spokesman for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) would not comment on Saturday's attacks. U.S. drone strikes have become relatively common during President Barack Obama's tenure with unmanned aircraft targeting suspected militants, their hideouts and training facilities. Saturday's drone strikes add to a flurry of attacks, however, with now eight drone strikes since last Sunday, killing at least 36 people. The Pakistani government has remained largely silent on the spike in drone strikes, but a foreign ministry spokeswoman condemned the attacks when asked about it on Friday. "We condemn drone strikes for violation of our territorial integrity and collateral damage," Tasnim Aslam Khan said. "Our position, that we have reiterated a number of times, remains unchanged." At least 110 people have been killed in 16 American drone strikes in Pakistan so far this year, according to the Washington-based think tank New America Foundation, which has documented at least 2,174 deaths as a result of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan since 2004. It includes at least 258 civilians, but the actual figure is thought to be higher. In January 2012, President Obama, for the first time during his presidency, publicly acknowledged that U.S. drones regularly strike suspected militants along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He confirmed that many of these strikes are carried out in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, targeting al-Qaeda and Taliban suspects in tough terrain. Pakistan's government has previously been public in its stance against American drone strikes as local residents and officials have blamed them for killing innocent civilians and motivating young men to join the Taliban. Details about alleged militants who are killed are almost never provided, and the U.S. government does not comment on the strikes. Despite the criticism, the United States has used drones as an important tool in their fight against terrorism. Al-Qaeda deputy leader Abu Yahya al-Libi was killed in a U.S. drone strike near Miranshah in June 2012 and Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud was killed in the same region in November 2013.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.

3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168

Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA

(702) 943.0321 Local

(702) 943.0233 Facsimile

info@unitedpressassociation.org

info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com