



**United States' Goals and Interests in Pakistan under the
Shadow of its Drone Warfare (2004-2014)**

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Abstract:

This research paper delves into the intricate dynamics between the United States' strategic objectives and its utilization of drone strikes within the context of Pakistan. Through an in-depth analysis, this study examines the multifaceted motivations and interests that drove the US to employ drone strikes as a key counterterrorism tool in Pakistan. The article dissects how the evolving security landscape, both globally and regionally, influenced the US decision-making process regarding drone strikes. It explores the perceived threats posed by terrorist networks operating in Pakistan and the strategies adopted by the United States to counter these threats. The article also considers the impact of drone strikes on regional dynamics, including neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India. The article contributes to a nuanced understanding of the historical context and evolving priorities that underpinned the US use of drone strikes in Pakistan. It sheds light on the intricate interplay between security imperatives, diplomatic maneuvering, and broader strategic goals, offering insights into the complexities of modern counterterrorism efforts and their implications for international relations.

Keywords: Pakistan, United States, CIA, Al-Qaida, drone strikes, terrorism

INTRODUCTION

After the 9/11 attacks, the American CIA has been carrying out drone strikes in the territory of an independent and sovereign country like Pakistan as part of its global war on terrorism since 2004. These drone strikes are mostly carried out in the Pakistan's erstwhile Federally Administered

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Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, which is far flung and remote region, hence difficult to administer. In 2004, drone strikes were initiated under the presidency of George W. Bush and the intensity of these strikes extensively increased under the Obama Administration, who ordered these strikes just after the few days of his presidency. Since that time, US Drone Policy carrying out by the CIA and the Pentagon claims to have targeted and killed several important Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. But according to various surveys conducted under the international bodies i.e. Amnesty International, these drone strikes are proving to be more detrimental and hazardous not only for Pakistan but for the US as well. Firstly, according to the UNO and other bodies' surveys, drone strikes killed more innocent civilians including women and children than High Value Targets (HVTs). Secondly, drone strikes violate the international humanitarian law hitting in the territories of a sovereign and independent country and killing innocent civilians, by considering all the military age people as their targets. Last, but not the least, these strikes caused strong Anti-Americanism in the minds of the people whose innocent kith and kin were being murdered in drone strikes.

This study aims: to investigate the primary goals and interests of the United States in Pakistan, encompassing counterterrorism efforts, regional stability, geopolitical influence, and broader strategic interests; to examine the rationale behind the United States' decision to employ drone strikes in Pakistan, including the perceived advantages, limitations, and challenges associated with this strategy; to assess the effectiveness of drone strikes in achieving the United States' counterterrorism objectives, including their impact on disrupting terrorist networks and preventing potential attacks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several writers and scholars have written on this topic. The articles discussed in this literature review deals with the US' drone policy in Pakistan that either there are more benefits associated with it or it is a program that is continuing to become counterproductive for the US as well as Pakistan. Medea Benjamin (2013) views that when the CIA started its search of Taliban and Al-Qaeda Leaders, these drones started hovering and buzzing in the atmosphere. People of these areas were afraid of being attacked or killed anytime during the day or night. There were more psychological impacts of these drone strikes in addition to the direct damage of life and property as the feeling of being hit was always there and there was the continuing buzzing sound even when there were no drones in the air. She also stressed that a profound debate is needed against this technology which was only possessed by the US at the time of initiation of these strikes during Bush presidency. The use of this technology violated the norms of international law as it killed people indiscriminately. The people in the US even condemned the brutal use of drones to kill innocent people.

Sara Birkenthal in her work states that how the US strove to achieve her goals through drone strikes. Two types of strikes are carried out; signature strikes and personality strikes. In signature strikes, targeted people are believed to be militants while personality strikes involve evidence that a particular person is a known terrorist. Since 2004, the American CIA claims to have killed important Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders like Khan Muhammad, Molvi Nazeer's Deputy Commander Janbaz Zadran, senior Qaeda member Ilyas Kashmiri and Abu Zaid al-Iraqi (Plaw & Fricker 2012). But according to reports, the percentage of innocent people including children and women being

killed in these drone attacks outweigh the percentage of the HVTs. The drone strikes are like a double edged sword i.e. first of all, it protects the interests of the U.S and also hurts her image abroad. As far as the opinion of the people of Pakistan is concerned, extremely large percentage of them actually believes that very few of the terrorists are being killed by these strikes and greater percentage is of the innocent people. Then, she highlights some of the benefits achieved by drone strikes as they limit the costs of the conventional warfare, because there is no actual presence of soldiers physically in the enemy territory and with the no loss of American lives (Beeders & Ceballos, 2014).

This research is different from the previous studies conducted on the basis of costs and benefits analysis which has been done from both the Pakistan and the US perspective. This study discusses the costs and benefits of these strikes from both the Pakistan and American perspective and the makes analysis on the basis of the findings.

THE US' POLICY OF UNLAWFUL KILLINGS BY DRONES

The drone attacks have been used by the US in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and some other states to kill than capture the suspected terrorists in these regions. Professor Gary Solis in the Georgetown University stated that, "there are two types of drone offenses being used by the US, one is used by our military in the war arena and other by the CIA in Pakistan" (Anderson, 2009). These drone strikes were being operated as far as by the CIA Headquarters in Virginia or the US Military posts in the Khost, Afghanistan, and Pakistan or in some other nearby regions. The US drone strikes in the Afghanistan and Iraq were not questioned much because US was already at war with these states, but these strikes were much questioned by Pakistan because US was not in direct hostility with Islamabad, and was therefore conducting covert strikes by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

This is not the first time when the US made strikes in a country which was not in direct combat, but the US has also conducted drone attacks in a country like Yemen. In 2002, in Yemen, US killed Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi with his six companions in a car with a drone attack who was involved in the killings of 17 US sailors. Many US persons including the intelligence officials praised the CIA's covert Drone strikes being tired of slow process of target locating and executing. This strike was justified under the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) under the right of self-defense by the imminent threats to the US. The US said that she was at war with the Al-Qaeda since 9/11 incident (Witt, 2002). National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice defended the US position by stating that, "the killing of the suspect was the just regarding of the accepted practice of self-defense."

The US since 9/11 has been carrying out these drone strikes in pursuit of the terrorists involved in the incident and strove to to prove that the desired results were being achieved by the drone strikes whereas the US only achieved short term objectives. Most of the persons killed in drone strikes were innocent civilians and the terrorists killed were only low value targets (LVTs). The US tried to kill Saddam Hussein through drone strikes but could not succeed. So, in the aftermath of this incident, the CIA carried out its first drone strike in Afghanistan in 2002 at former Mujahedeen Base in Zhawar Kili. It killed approximately three persons and according to the spokespersons it was carried out to kill Osama Bin Laden as he seemed to be among the persons killed as one of those men was tall but it was never Bin Laden. Another woman spokesperson of Pentagon said that, "We are convinced that it was the appropriate target," and added, "Yet, we don't know exactly who

it was." Since that time the US is carrying out its deadly program of drones in Pakistan where it was doing more damages than good, as a lot of innocent civilians were being killed under these drone strikes whereas a little damage occurs to the HVTs. Later on, most of the countries including Pakistan, India, China, Israel and even non-state actors as Hamas and Hezbollah adopted drone technology which may be detrimental to the international peace (Sifton, 2012).

United States' Goals and Interests in Pakistan under the Shadow of its Drone Strikes

To draw a comparative analysis of the drone strikes with respect of its costs and benefits, it is necessary to take into consideration the US' perspective regarding its drone policy. This section analyzes how the drone policy is advantageous to the US and also in what areas US has to suffer concerning the ill effects of these strikes. According to the sources provided by the Associated Press and the New York Times, President of the United States of America acts as the final decision making person when a personality strike is to be made. When the CIA is hesitant to make a strike and is not sure about the civilian casualties that may arise, then the President orders the strike if he considers it suitable irrespective of the collateral damage (Becher & Shane, 2012). Daniel Klaidman from the Newsweek reported that President Obama had a full knowledge regarding every drone strike in Pakistan. Whenever he wanted to be updated about drone strikes he would call Leon Panetta, the CIA Director, and ask him about the position of the deadly strikes conducted by the CIA (Klaidman, 2012). The Agency and the Special Operations Command, later with the help of Joint Special Operations Command, have their own lists and sometimes these may overlap. The US Administration states that it had a special procedure for deciding about targets and the strategies to kill them. Most of the times the strikes resulted in a total failure and the chance of civilian death increases as most of the strikes were signature strikes based on the movements of the stricken people with the targets and their doubtful activities (Dozier, 2011).

Another advantage of the drone strikes from the US' perspective is that like the manned aircrafts, the drones have the ability to provide air support, even more proficiently as they are airborne. They are also able to halt enemy attack and in case of other attacks they are able to deliver and throw hell fire missiles on the enemy and are at a very large altitudes and hence difficult to locate. They are also cheaper than the manned aircrafts and there are some problems also related to drones as they require special environment regarding their ability as they are highly dependent on thermal sensors and cameras. The chances of the targets to be missed are also there and hence the collateral damages occur. Another benefit of the drone program according to the US is that it minimizes the chance of any harm to the US soldiers as there is no US' soldier's boot on the ground and the state does not come in a direct hostility with a state, as in case of Pakistan. The US ensures that it does not violate the sovereignty of a country as there are no US soldiers on the ground in the foreign territory. It abrogates and violates other state's sovereignty as it is against the norms of international law to carry out a lethal program in a country without any direct conflict. The US adopts variety of techniques for targeted killing as it has been involved in the killing of Osama Bin Laden in the compound and the firing of missiles on the suspected place where Saddam Hussein and his sons were believed to be hiding. It believes in its strategic aims that are being met through this strategy of killing, with drones as a main tool, irrespective of the costs suffered (Zenko, 2009).

A question may arise for the US that if the drone strike in Yemen in 2002 had proved politically ineffective, then how can there be any chances of it to be politically fruitful in case of its strikes in

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Philippines and Mali? What if the targeted personnel or states are not willing to change their attitudes? In short, it can be said that the US' Drone Program may be proving counterproductive as it is not able to have its interests fulfilled. The US carried out its strike mostly in North Waziristan area of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) where, the US adopted targeted killing as a main agenda to combat terrorists. Through this, targeted killings by drone, the US claims that it has assassinated a number of al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders including Khan Muhammad, the deputy commander of Moulvi Nazeer; Janbaz Zardan, Abu Hafs al-Shahri, Atiya Abd -al-Rehman, who was the al-Qaeda leading person in Pakistan, Ilyas Kashmiri and Abu Zaid al-Iraqi (Day & Brehony, 2020). All of them were important personnel of al-Qaeda who seem to be operating in Pakistan and killed by these drone strikes. The sources from where these data come are controlled by the US, as they do not share information with any media hence there is no scrutiny and hence there is no public support (Buley, 2007). Any data regarding drones come through New America Foundation and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. There is a total negation about the statistics brought out by Pakistani media and even by the researches, conducted under International Peacekeeping Bodies as UN and the Amnesty International.

Another advantage according to the American point of view is that the drone strikes have been effective in targeting and eradicating terrorists in the north west regions of Pakistan where terrorists had their hideouts. They get killed in drone strikes and the new leadership that came was not well aware and unable to communicate as they may come under the exposure of the drones and get killed. So the threat of terrorism decreased (Byman, 2014). The US justified its drone policy in Pakistan in this way as the Pakistani Government was unable to minimize the threat posed by the terrorists in its territory. There was also a threat to the US and its allies. The US then could take prompt actions if necessary, according to a publication by German Marshall Fund of the US (Fair, 2014). Scholars and intellectuals were also of the same opinion that if the weak governments were not willing or unable to take the coercive measures, then the responsibility came upon the US to defend the people of that country and its own security as well as the security of its allies. It has also been spoken by the Administration, as John Brennan, White House Security Advisor states, "In Pakistan, American Strategy of coercive measures against terrorists in the former's territory is justified as its government is not able to take needed and necessary actions (Rizzo, 2013)."

Since 2004, there have occurred 377 drone strikes in Pakistan mostly in its northwestern regions especially in FATA. The American Government is hesitant to disclose the actual data and hence the facts about the actual deaths are dubious. According to the American Media Perspective that is again a biased source, drone attacks killed almost 2132-3496 people in Pakistan with 1675-2855 militants and 258-307 civilians by 6th of August 2014. The reason of such a lower percentage of civilians killed is again the molding of the results and the biased media. Another reason reported for such a lower percentage is that all the military age personnel found in the targeted area are considered as terrorists.

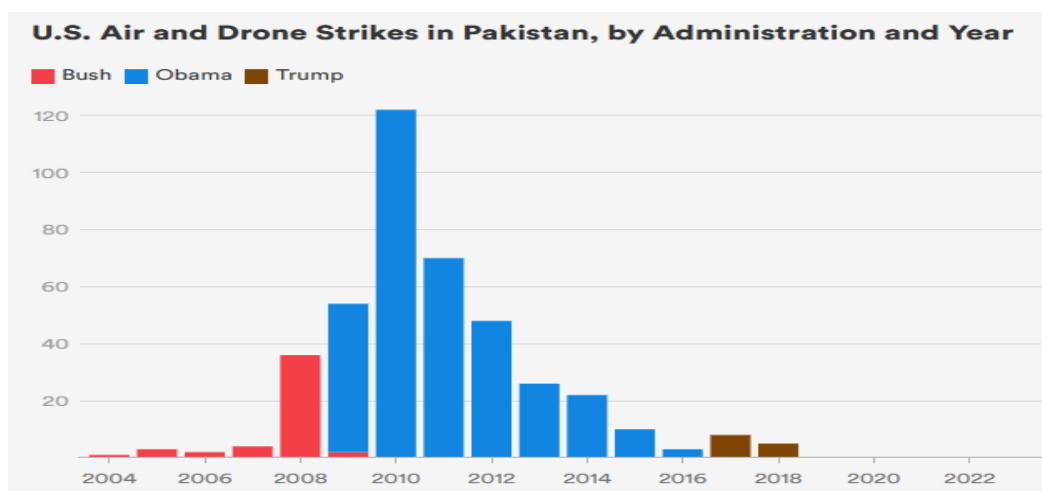
Other Side of the Story

After analyzing the benefits of the drones from the US's perspective, this section discusses the cost Pakistan has to pay for these drone strikes. The US has tried to justify the use of drones under her right of self-defense that how the Pakistani Government has been unable to halt the terrorist attacks in the country. It is the state's responsibility to protect the lives of the people in Pakistan

and also for its own security and of its allies as well. Since 2004, Pakistan suffered much due to the drone strikes in the form of distrust of its own people, not being able to protect its people from deadliest bombing, compromising its sovereignty and to stop the killing of its innocent civilians in its own territory. Pakistani Government is under severe criticism from its people for compromising its sovereignty in the hands of a foreign country. So, this section discusses the cost that Pakistan has paid.

The policy makers of the US may not be getting the true picture of the effects of their policies on a country which is actually suffering as a result of these deadliest drone strikes. It yields no fruits but aggravated the already perplexed situation. The US is only focusing on the short term objectives as the militants killed in the drone strikes are only low value targets (LVTs) and when they bounce back, it becomes disastrous not only for Pakistan but also for the US. There is a strong feeling of revenge in the people of Tribal Areas particularly and Pakistan generally as they developed a strong feeling of hatred for the US. The US needs to revisit its policy of targeted killings in Pakistan and work in collaboration with the Pakistani Government so that the actual militants involved in the terrorist activities could be executed and no damage should occur to the innocent people. A peaceful, stable and sovereign Pakistan can only ensure peace in the country and can be a strategic partner with the US in its war against terror.

It is pertinent to mention here that US drone strikes in Pakistan did not stop in 2014, but beginning a slow decline in drone strikes when US administration under President Obama conducted only three strikes in territory of Pakistan. US under President Obama conducted its last drone strikes on May 21, 2016 when these strikes were made to kill then-Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour in Balochistan. There were no strikes conducted by United States in last eight months of Obama administration. After Obama, when Donald Trump came into power, administration under him made first strike in Pakistan on March 2, 2017 (Ahmed & Iftikhar, 2017). However, there can be seen few strikes in year 2018 and after that no known strikes have been conducted by US administration in Pakistan (Figure-1).



Source: New America, America's Counterterrorism Wars: The Drone War in Pakistan (newamerica.org)

Pakistani Government's Stance on the US Drone Strikes in the Ex-Fata and Other Tribal Areas

Now the question arises that either the Pakistani Government had given its consent to attack its tribal areas with the drone strikes or the US was carrying out drone strikes on her own owing to her stubbornness and being a Super Power? In the second case, if it is proved that the US carried out drone strikes without Pakistan's consent, then US violated the international law and the sovereignty of Pakistan which seems obvious to everyone. The US claims that in January 2008, Pervez Musharraf the then president of Pakistan allowed the CIA to set up its bases in the territory of Pakistan and to carry out its covert drone strikes in Pakistan. Mike McConnell, the Director of National Intelligence, on his visit to Islamabad stated that in a meeting with Musharraf, he allowed the CIA to carry out its covert drone strikes in the FATA to fight the militants in these areas. On the other hand, this has been denied by Pervez Musharraf who stated that he did not make any secret deal with the CIA authorizing it to attack the innocent civilians without even bringing them to trial. He further added that he would not allow any such program in which Pakistan would have to compromise her sovereignty and to act against the integrity of Pakistan and said that the allegations put on him are baseless and does not exist at all (Nagpal, 2009). It is not certain that what is the reality because if the Pakistani government did not allow the strikes then why the US was using Shamsi Airbase in Pakistan.

It was reported by the fox News that in an image published by the London Times it can be seen clearly that the two drones were stationed on the Shamsi Airbase in the year 2006. It was stated by a US Official in an interview with the Fox News that the US had been using the Shamsi Airbase of Pakistan located in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan from where the American CIA conducted its covert drone strikes in the tribal areas of the Pakistan mainly the FATA region (Ahmad, 2013). An ambiguous role has been played by the Pakistani government, it condemned the drone attacks in the public but showed its consent covertly. Asif Ali Zardari, the former president of Pakistan once said that the drone attacks conducted by the CIA in Pakistan were counterproductive and resulted in the death of the innocent civilians. He further added that the drone strikes were difficult to be explained by the democratically elected government of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). He did not talk about the sovereignty of the country which was being compromised (Hersh, 2016).

The National Assembly of Pakistan passed a resolution against the US's drone strikes in Pakistan stating that the strikes were violating the sovereignty of Pakistan. In a resolution passed by the Senate, these drone strikes were marked as a death blow to the integrity of Pakistan. The leader of the House Raza Rabbani at that time assured the elected representatives that they would register their protest of drone strikes to the US Ambassador by calling him. They would pressurize the government to implement this agenda and ask the US to stop its aggressive drone strikes that were killing innocent civilians in the country. The provincial assembly of the NWFP also passed a resolution against these drone strikes calling it against the territorial integrity of Pakistan.

It was also stated by the Pakistani Defense Minister Ahmed Mukhtar that Pakistan would not allow the US to use Shamsi Airbase any further as the government of Pakistan was not satisfied with the payments paid by the US, the US needed to increase the sums. Here the point arises that even if the US increased the amount paid for using Shamsi Airbase, would you still allow the US to carry out its deadly strikes on the tribal areas of Pakistan killing innocent civilians mostly. And also, how can you compromise the sovereignty of your country for some dollars? Since then there is a dubious

position of the Pakistani Government as sometimes it criticized the strikes in the public but tacitly ignored it. Such a stance is also adopted by the successive Pakistani Government as well.

The US fired two drone missiles, after the break of six months, killing at least 16 people that are said to be terrorists by the US media. These attacks happened on the 11th and 12th of the June 2014 at the Dargah Mandi and Darpah Khel, parts of the Miranshah. The Pakistani Foreign Minister's spokesperson Tasneem Aslam condemned these strikes and said that they were against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan. She further said that these strikes were also harmful for the establishment of peace in the region (Subhai, 2014). Pakistan needed straight policies without any covert agendas to pressurize the US to stop aggressive measures to tackle terrorism in the former's territory. And, according to the constitution of Pakistan the basic right to live is provided to every citizen in this country and this is the responsibility of the government to take a severe stance against this US' drone policy. Pakistan needed to take its national interest as a primary agenda, no matter whatever it takes. As these drone attacks resulted in severe wave of terrorism in the country and the peace can only be established if the Pakistan government takes actions all by itself without taking any dictation.

CONCLUSION

The US goals and interests in Pakistan remained significantly influenced by the shadow of its drone strikes. Over the years, the US pursued multiple objectives in the region, including counterterrorism efforts, regional stability, and geopolitical influence. However, the utilization of drone strikes remained a contentious aspect of this relationship, impacting bilateral relations and posing significant challenges. The drone strikes have shown successes in eliminating high-value terrorist targets, disrupting extremist networks, and preventing potential attacks. These operations have been a vital component of the US counterterrorism strategy, aimed at safeguarding its national security interests and protecting American lives at home and abroad. The persistent threat posed by terrorist groups in Pakistan and the surrounding region led the US to employ drone strikes as a precise and remote means of combating this menace. However, the drone strikes also generated serious concerns. Reports of civilian casualties and collateral damage triggered widespread public outcry in Pakistan, leading to anti-American sentiments and political backlash against the US. Furthermore, the strikes raised questions about the infringement of Pakistan's national sovereignty and the legality of these operations under international law.

The evolving US stance on drone strikes and their frequency influenced Pakistan's cooperation in counterterrorism efforts. While drone strikes at times created tensions between the two nations, they have also resulted in moments of increased collaboration when both countries shared common goals and interests in combating terrorism. Nonetheless, lack of transparency surrounding the drone program and the perceived disregard for Pakistan's sovereignty complicated efforts to build trust and mutual understanding. Public sentiments and media coverage played a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the US actions in Pakistan. Negative portrayals of drone strikes intensified anti-American sentiments and hampered broader diplomatic initiatives. The US must be cognizant of the potential ramifications of its actions and communicate its intentions more effectively to mitigate backlash and misinterpretations.

In conclusion, the US goals and interests in Pakistan have been complex and multifaceted, influenced by the impact of drone strikes. While the US effectively targeted terrorist elements, the negative consequences raised questions about the long-term sustainability of this strategy. Moving forward, it is crucial for both countries to engage in constructive dialogue, address each other's concerns, and develop alternative strategies for counterterrorism cooperation. Respecting Pakistan's sovereignty, addressing civilian casualties, and enhancing transparency are essential steps to rebuild trust and foster a more cooperative relationship. The US should consider adopting a comprehensive approach that not only prioritizes security interests but also recognizes the broader economic, political, and social dynamics at play in Pakistan and the region. Ultimately, a more nuanced and balanced approach to counterterrorism efforts would contribute to more stable and sustainable relations between the US and Pakistan, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation in addressing shared challenges.

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