

Latest U.S. drone strike in Pakistan kills 18 people

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USPA News - At least eighteen people were killed on Thursday when a U.S. drone struck a suspected militant compound in Pakistan's volatile tribal region, just one day after another U.S. drone killed five suspected militants in the same region, officials said. Pakistani intelligence officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the latest attack happened on Thursday when an unmanned U.S. drone fired four missiles at a madrassa (religious school) in the Buland Khel area of Orakzai agency, close to the borders of the North and South Waziristan tribal regions.

The officials said the madrassa was led by an individual who is believed to be affiliated with the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani Network, which is one of the top terrorist organizations and threats to U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan. At least 18 suspected militants, most of them from Afghanistan, were killed while several others were injured. Thursday's strike came less than 24 hours after a U.S. drone struck a suspected militant hideout in the Hurmuz area, located east of Miranshah, the main town of Pakistan's volatile North Waziristan tribal region which is near the border with Afghanistan. The strike killed five people whose affiliation remain unknown, but there were no reports of civilian casualties. A spokesman for Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry condemned the drone strikes, calling them illegal. "A protest has been lodged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the U.S. Embassy (in) Islamabad on drone strikes inside Pakistani territory on 10 and 11 October 2012," he said. The ministry, which regularly files protests at the U.S. Embassy over the drone strikes, added: "The Embassy was informed that drone strikes on Pakistani territory were a clear violation of International Law and Pakistan's sovereignty. These attacks were unacceptable to Pakistan." U.S. drones regularly carry out drone attacks against suspected militants in Pakistan. Earlier this month, three suspected militants were killed when a U.S. drone fired a series of missile strikes against a vehicle in the Khaider Khel area of Mir Ali district, located just east of Miranshah. Pakistani officials have repeatedly described the U.S. drone attacks as illegal. Pakistani President Asif Zardari previously expressed the need to establish alternative security operations to the drone strikes, but U.S. officials have indicated that they will continue to carry out drone strikes to take out militants. Few details about casualties from the strikes are usually available, but allegations of civilian casualties regularly spark protests in Pakistan. According to the Washington-based think tank New America Foundation, as many as 3,191 individuals have been killed as a result of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan between 2004 and October 2012. In June, al-Qaeda deputy leader Abu Yahya al-Libi was killed when an unmanned U.S. drone fired at least two missiles at a compound and a nearby pickup truck in the village of Hesokhel, located in the Mir Ali district just east of Miranshah. It was the most serious blow to al-Qaeda since U.S. Navy SEALs killed Osama bin Laden during a secret military operation in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad in May 2011. Earlier this year, in January, U.S. President Barack 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. The United States considers the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region to be the most dangerous place on Earth. The area is known to be a stronghold of the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani Network, which is one of the top terrorist organizations and threats to U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan. But controversy has surrounded the drone strikes as local residents and officials have blamed them for killing innocent civilians and motivating young men to join the Taliban. Details about the alleged militants are usually not provided, and the U.S. government does not comment on the strikes because the program is classified.

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