

Drone Wars for April 2014 compiled by Elayne Jude for Great North News Service

Lockheed Martin announced the launch of three new unmanned aerial vehicle capabilities, including a small vertical takeoff and landing rotor aircraft. These are aimed at both the military and the civilian commercial customer.

http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2014/04/29/Lockheed-develops-three-new-UAV-technologies/4661398801419/?spt=mps&or=2

April saw the continuing campaign against AQAP in Yemen move up a gear, with a largescale attack on a training camp in a remote mountainous area.

A documentary released midmonth revealed that drone strikes in Pakistan attributed to the CIA have been carried out by a regular US air force unit, 17th Reconnaissance Squadron, which operates from a secure compound in Creech air base, in the Mojave desert. Two former special forces drone operators made this revelation, later confirmed by six more anonymous operators, for the film, Drone.

Established as a regular drone squadron in 2002, the 17th moved to CIA control in 2004, as CIA strikes began in Pakistan.

Hina Shamsi, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's National Security Project, said, in an interview with The Guardian: "We don't know precisely what rules the CIA is operating under, but what we do know makes clear that it's not abiding by the laws that strictly limit extrajudicial killing both in and out of traditional battlefields. Now we have to ask whether the regular military is violating those laws as well, under the secrecy that the CIA wields as sword and shield over its killing activities."

Serving air force personnel may now be exposed to legal challenges based on their direct involvement in a programme which may be in violation of international law.

Also operating out of Creech, the 30th Reconnaissance Squadron "test-flies" the RQ-170 Sentinel, and the 22nd and 867th Reconnaissance Squadrons fly Reapers

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2014/apr/14/drone-documentary-video>

It has emerged that two men killed in a strike in Yemen in November 2013 were Australian and New Zealand nationals. New Zealand's prime minister John Key said he believed the New Zealander had attended a terrorist training camp, and was under surveillance by intelligence agencies. Australia's department of foreign affairs released a statement: "We understand the men were killed during a counter-terrorism operation and do not intend to discuss its details...There was no Australian involvement in, or prior awareness of, the operation."

1 April - Yemen. Three suspected AQAP fighters killed in the first strike in Yemen in nearly three weeks.

An AQAP training centre in the Al Mahfad area of Abyan province, recently featured in an AQAP propaganda video, was targeted. Three missiles were fired at two huts and a site allegedly used as a training centre. Four were wounded, some seriously.

AQAP fighters collected the wounded and drove them to Azzan in Shabwa province.

In early 2012 AQAP regrouped in the area, after being driven from cities such as Zinjibar, Jaar, Lawdar, and Shaqra during a Yemeni military offensive.

7 April - Afghanistan.

Two top Taliban leaders and fifteen other militants were reportedly killed in a strike in Shegal district, eastern Kunar province, Afghanistan.

Taliban's shadow provincial governor, Qasim Sabri, was killed along with shadow district governor Qari Osman, according to local officials. The strike was carried out around 3:00 pm local time, as the militants planned to cross the border and enter Pakistan.

Several other Taliban militants were also reportedly killed.

The Afghan national directorate of security (NDS) issued a statement said Tuesday that the latest intelligence report indicates that a gathering of the senior Pakistani and Afghan Taliban leaders was targeted. The meeting was organised by the Taliban shadow governor for Kunar in Shegal district, which was attended by senior Pakistani and Afghan Taliban leaders.

*This report was carried by the Afghan news agency Khaama Press. It may have been executed by conventional means, and misreported in the initial aftermath. It was not reported by Long War Journal, widely accepted as the definitive recorder of strikes.

19 April - Yemen. 16 AQAP fighters and five civilians died in the second strike in Yemen this month.

The strike targeted a pickup truck carrying AQAP fighters travelling in the Hazmiah area of Baydah province. Local media reported that the vehicle was carrying a large amount of dynamite and that the strike killed all on board. Five civilians travelling in a separate car was also hit. Six more civilians in another car are reported wounded.

A military source told the Arabic media that prominent leaders in AQAP had been killed in the strike, including Abu Osama Al Hasni, Akram al Hafza, Seif Mohammad Seif Abd al Rahman al Sakhra, Ali Saleh al Khabani, and Adham Ali Mohsen. AQAP has not confirmed the deaths of any senior leaders.

Baydah province is a hub of AQAP activity. The last strike in Baydah took place in December 2013, when 15 civilians were reportedly killed.

20/21 April - Yemen. 56 killed, including possibly AQAP's top bomb maker, in two strikes over the Easter weekend. The death of bombmaker Ibrahim Hassan Tali al Asiri is as yet unconfirmed.

Asiri is a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. He was allegedly responsible for the failed Christmas Day 2009 airliner attack and for the design of an underwear bomb which was to be detonated on an airliner. Asiri claimed to have trained other operatives in AQAP in bombmaking.

The strike that targeted Asiri took place after midnight on a highway between the districts of Markhah and Bayhan, in Shabwa province. A car was targeted as it traveled on the highway. Four alleged AQAP fighters were killed. Asiri is reported to be among them.

Initial reports suggest that helicopters picked up four bodies, presumably to identify them.

In the second strike, an AQAP training camp in the Al Mahfad district of Abyan province was attacked. More than 30 AQAP militants were reported killed in the strike at a secret training camp in the mountains between Shabwa and Abyan provinces. The strike was carried out after Yemeni intelligence received information regarding an active plan to attack military and civilian installations. Operatives of several nationalities are said to have been killed in the strike. The Yemeni air force bombarded the camp for a few hours afterwards.