

Since the 29th June the United States has carried out four unmanned airstrikes:

July 10th: The United States' first unmanned airstrike in two weeks was against a compound in the village of Sheerani Mada Khel near Miramshah, North Waziristan. Pakistani officials reported that between 10 and 14 'militants' were killed in the strike. However at this time none were believed to be senior al Qaeda or Taliban figures.

July 24th: Several missiles were fired during an unmanned strike against a hideout used by the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan in the Angora Adda area of South Waziristan. The strike killed 16 Taliban 'militants,' however none were deemed senior operatives.

July 25th: The U.S. carried out its second unmanned attack in as many days in South Waziristan against a vehicle and Taliban compound in the village of Shaktoi Algad. Four Taliban 'militants' were reported killed and an additional five were injured. None were believed to be senior Taliban or al Qaeda figures. The exact target of the strike remains unknown. However Shaktoi Algad is located in a region of South Waziristan under the influence of Hakeemullah Mehsud. Hakeemullah assumed control of the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan after his brother Baitullah was killed in a US airstrike in August 2009. The U.S. has been actively pursuing Hakeemullah since discovering his involvement in the attack on Combat Outpost Chapman, Afghanistan, in December 2009.

July 25th: The second airstrike of the day was against a compound in the village of Darga Mandi near Miramshah, North Waziristan. Four 'militants' were reported killed in the attack and additional two were injured. No senior al Qaeda or Taliban figures were reported amongst the casualties.

According to the Long War Journal, the United States has so far carried out 49 unmanned airstrikes this year. As only four airstrikes have been reported since the last update the United States appears have scaled down attacks to levels comparable with May/early June. However, as the U.S. carried out 53 airstrikes in 2009 it remains highly likely that it will surpass this figure in 2010.

August sees the arrival of a new UAV. The MQ-1C weighs 1.5 tonnes and is capable of carrying 135.4kg of sensors internally, and up to 227.3kg of sensors and weapons externally. It has an endurance level of up to 36 hours and a top speed of 270kmh. The MQ-1C is capable of carrying four Hellfire missiles or a dozen 70mm guided missiles. By comparison, the MQ-1C's Reaper cousin has a maximum speed of 215kmh, can fly sorties of between 12 ♦ 20 hours and carries only two Hellfire missiles.

The Special Operations Command (SOCOM) is one of the first army units to receive the MQ-1C. The army eventually plans to equip each combat brigade with an MQ-1C company consisting of 115 troops, 12 UAVs and five ground stations. SOCOM MQ-1C units will support special operations in Afghanistan. This means that this UAV remains outside of activities within Pakistan and ultimately the CIA. However, the arrival of MQ-1C adds another dimension to the United States' unmanned activities in Afghanistan. It will be interesting to assess if they are eventually utilised across the border.

For more information on UAVs we also recommend a visit to Drone Wars UK. The blog can be found here.