

Drone Wars for October 2013 is compiled by Elayne Jude, Senior Research Associate, U K Defence Forum

An exceptionally long hiatus was broken on October 21 in Afghanistan by the killing of Taliban commander Qari Darwan, and on 1 November, Hakeemullah Mehsud, the leader of the al Qaeda-linked Movement of the Taliban Pakistan, was killed in Waziristan. mehsud had been due to participate in imminent peace talks with the Pakistani government, and his killing sparked an intense and polarised international response.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/04/hakimullah-mehsud-pakistan-peace-us-drone-strikes>

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/120000-farmhouse-where-Pakistan-Taliban-chief-Hakimullah-Mehsud-died/articleshow/25210072.cms>

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pakistani-official-accuses-us-of-sabotage-as-drone-targets-taliban-leaders-in-northwest/2013/11/01/1463d0c2-431d-11e3-b028-de922d7a3f47_story.html

More on the next page, including an update on attempts to move operations from the CIA to the DoD.

In late October Amnesty International issued a report charging that America's use of drones has violated international law, killing scores of innocent civilians and targeting suspected terrorists in ways that may constitute extrajudicial executions or war crimes.

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/drones-major-new-report-says-usa-must-account-pakistan-killings>

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/22/world/asia/civilian-deaths-in-drone-strikes-cited-in-report.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20131022&r=1&

Human Rights Watch and the Harvard Law School released a question-and-answer document about the legal problems posed by drones:

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/21/ga-fully-autonomous-weapons>

- following up their November 2012 report, Losing Humanity: The Case Against Killer Robots
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/11/19/losing-humanity-0>.

At a meeting of the UN disarmament committee, France urged countries to "look to the future" by addressing the challenges posed by fully autonomous weapons and "the fundamental question of the place of man in the decision to use lethal force." France said that military, legal and technical experts should consider the issue in "an appropriate disarmament forum." The United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva met in May, to consider a report by the UN expert on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions that listed a range of concerns over fully autonomous weapons. The report called for a moratorium on development of the weapons until an international framework is agreed upon.

The House of Commons Defence Select Committee published written evidence submitted to its Inquiry into the use of UACVs, including memos from Thales, ADS, RUSI, the Association of Military Court Advocates the Bureau of Investigative Journalism:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/writev/772/contents.htm>

21 October - Afghanistan. A Taliban commander in the northeastern Afghan province of Kunar who has been hunted by US forces since 2009 is reported killed in Kunar Province, northern Afghanistan. Qari Dawat, whose real name is Haji Mohammad Dawran Safi, was a senior Taliban leader in Pech, who had vowed to avenge the killing of bin Laden by a US Seal team.

Dawat and three other alleged commanders were killed early on the morning of October 21.

Dawat was responsible for the kidnapping of Paul Refsdal, a Norwegian journalist, on Nov. 5, 2009. Refsdal was released six days later, after converting to Islam. An airstrike was launched that month in an effort to kill Dawat. Four alleged Taliban fighters were supposedly killed in it, including one "known for attacking innocent civilians in the Kunar region, as well as international forces and bases," according to a US military press release

Dawat resurfaced in May 2011, after the death of bin Laden. Dawat told Al Jazeera, "We will avenge him and follow in his footsteps, and we will maintain the momentum of the jihad against foreign and agent forces."

In April 2012 Dawat announced that dismantling and infiltrating the Afghan Army and police forces is the top "priority" of the Taliban.

October 28 - Somalia. Two Shabaab operatives, including a senior explosives expert, died in a strike that targeted a vehicle in southern Somalia. Three missiles were fired at a car as it traveled in the town of Jilib, about 50 miles north of Kismayo.

One of the two killed was Anta Anta, described as "the mastermind of al Shabab's suicide missions" by Voice of America. In 2008 Anta was involved in a series of coordinated suicide attacks in 2008 that targeted the presidential palace, a UN compound, the Ethiopian Consulate in Somaliland, and an intelligence headquarters in Puntland. The identity of the second operative was not disclosed.

The strike in Jilib was likely launched from a US base in Arba Minch. in Ethiopia, whose existence was revealed in 2011.

On Oct. 5, US Navy SEALs attempted to capture Abdulkadir Mohamed Abdulkadir, Shabaab's external operations chief, also known as Ikrima. The US Department of Defense said that US forces withdrew after concerns over possible civilian casualties.

October 30 - South Waziristan. Three killed in first strike in Pakistan in a month.

A pair of missiles were fired at a compound in the village of Zafar, in the Miramshah area of South Waziristan. The strike killed three suspected militants and wounded three other people. The identities of the dead and wounded were not disclosed at the time.

This was the first strike in Pakistan since Sept. 30, when three "rebels" were targeted in the Datta Khel area of North Waziristan. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement denouncing that action, and called for the US to bring a halt to the programme in North and South Waziristan. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called last week for the US to end the strikes, after his meeting with President Barack Obama. Pakistan's Ministry of Defence released a report stating that 67 civilians have been killed in drone strikes since the beginning of 2009, and that no civilians have been killed since the beginning of 2012.

Based on Pakistani press reports, at least 2,074 alleged jihadists have been killed in strikes since the beginning of 2009, including some of al Qaeda's top leaders. There have been 102 reported civilian deaths in strikes in Pakistan since January 1 2009. Civilian casualties are difficult to assess; the figure may be higher than 102.

There have been 24 drone strikes in Pakistan so far this year. In 2010, 117 attacks were recorded. In 2011, 64 strikes; in 2012, 46 strikes.

November 1 - North Waziristan. Hakeemullah Mehsud, emir of the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan was killed in the second strike in the tribal agency in three days.

A pair of missiles were fired at Hakeemullah's vehicle as it left a mosque in the village of Danday Darpa Khel in the Miramshah area of North Waziristan. Five other 'militants' were killed.

Hakeemullah's bodyguard, who was identified as Tariq Mehsud, and his driver, Abdullah Mehsud, are said to be among those killed in today's attack.

Danday Darpa Khel is a known hub for al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Haqqani Network. A previous strike, on July 2, killed Abu Saif al Jaziri, an al Qaeda military commander in the Lashkar al Zil, and Maulana Akhtar Zadran, a Haqqani Network officer.

Hakeemullah was killed one day after the Pakistani government announced that it was formally negotiating a peace agreement with the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan.

Late news ; An update from Gordon Lubbold's Situation Report for Foreign Policy Magazine:

In May, the White House leaked word that it would start shifting drone operations from the shadows of the CIA to the relative sunlight of the Defense Department in an effort to be more transparent about the controversial targeted killing program. But six months later, the so-called migration of those operations has stalled, and it is now unlikely to happen anytime soon, Situation Report has learned. The anonymous series of announcements with remarks President Obama made on counterterrorism policy at National Defense University in which he called for "transparency and debate on this issue." A classified Presidential Policy Guidance on the matter, issued at the same time, caught some in government by surprise, triggering a scramble at the Pentagon and at CIA to achieve a White House objective. The transfer was never expected to happen overnight. But it is now clear the complexity of the issue, the distinct operational and cultural differences between the Pentagon and CIA and the bureaucratic politics of it all has forced officials on all sides to recognize transferring drone operations from the Agency to the Defense Department represents, for now, an unattainable goal.

A U.S. official told Situation Report: "The physics of making this happen quickly are remarkably difficult... The goal remains the same, but the reality has set in."

A former senior government official familiar with intelligence matters says part of the reason for the complexity of the issue of migrating operations is because there is a system the Agency has developed over 12 years and it's not as simple as just handing it all over. "Building function is about moving knowledge as much as it is about moving aircraft," the person told Situation Report.

Another U.S. official told Shane Harris that there has not been some sort of policy reversal, and that the transition is moving forward, "but it obviously takes some time," the official said. "And as the process moves forward we also want to ensure that US capabilities remain robust and do not suffer."