Drone Strikes as Strategic Folly: Obama Is al-Qaeda's No. 1 Recruiter

by Edward Spannaus

Jan. 14—In early January, the *Washington Post* and other news sources reported a major escalation in drone strikes being carried out by the Obama Administration in Pakistan, with some observing that President Obama thinks he has found a way to conduct warfare against America's enemies without endangering U.S. troops on the ground.

In truth, what Obama has done, with his unprecedented application of drone missile strikes, has been to vastly accelerate recruitment to al-Qaeda and related organizations—more than they could ever have done on their own.

Obama's fascination with the means of raining down terror and death from the air, with minimal risk to ground forces, is hardly something new. Since the dawn of the use of air power in World War I, utopian war planners have been obsessed with the idea of perfecting a means of killing the enemy without the grinding brutality of trench warfare (as in the First World War), or of having to risk "boots on the ground" in later conflicts.

From the standpoint of sound military planning, air power has always been a pipe dream. Air power has never actually won a war, much less the peace—which is the true objective of a just war.

Furthermore, the forgotten truth of the matter is that Americans were repelled by the practice of what they regarded as "terror bombing," up through World War II, when the United States itself finally adopted the methods of terror bombing—e.g., Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, etc.—which became notorious in that war, carried out by both sides.

Some commentators are now again pointing out what U.S. military traditionalists have long understood: that the use of terror bombing—today in the form of drone strikes, killing "militants" and significant numbers of non-combatants in Pakistan, Yemen, etc.—is not only useless strategically, but it recruits more enemies than it kills, and it stiffens the resistance of the targetted population.

Two recent commentaries—both, ironically, published in London—provide relevant insight into what any thinking person should recognize as the strategic folly of Obama's drone war, which lies in the fact that Obama's killing spree is al-Qaeda's most efficient recruiting mechanism.

'Fool's Gold' and Body Counts

The first of these was written by British commentator Simon Jenkins, and published in the Jan. 10 London *Guardian* under the title "Drone wars are fool's gold: they prolong wars we can't win." Jenkins states outright that he has seen nothing that shows that drones serve any strategic purpose. "Their 'success' is expressed solely in body count, the number of so-called 'al-Qaida-linked commanders' killed. If body count were victory, the Germans would have won Stalingrad and the Americans Vietnam," Jenkins points out.

"Quite apart from ethics and law, I find it impossible to see what contribution these weapons make to winning wars," Jenkins writes, adding that the killing of an adversary's leaders just means that others are eager to replace them to exact revenge.

And the inevitable killing of civilians by drone strikes is critical to determining ultimate defeat or victory. Drone warfare "does not occupy or hold territory and it devastates hearts and minds," Jenkins says, and, without citing the famous World War II U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, he does acknowledge that "Aerial bombardment has long been a questionable weapon of war. It induces not defeat but retaliation."

Citing an example of the intensive German bombing of Malta in World War II, where, he says, belief in air power and the failure to launch a ground invasion cost Germany the Africa campaign, Jenkins notes that, "A weapon of airborne terror that fails to cow an enemy and merely invites defiance is not effective at all," and he points out that, today, 75% of Pakistanis now de-

Obama's drone strikes are ostensibly aimed at waging war without putting U.S. troops in harm's way, but what they have actually accomplished is a vast expansion of recruitment of jihadis to al-Qaeda. Shown, a Pakistani village destroyed by U.S. drone strikes.

clare themselves enemies of the United States. Likewise, in Yemen, al-Qaeda recruiters display pictures of drone-butchered women and children to add to their ranks.

"Yet each week," Jenkins writes, "Obama apparently sits down and goes through a 'kill lists' of Muslims he intends to eliminate, with no judicial process and no more identification than the word of a dodgy spy on the ground."

The quest for a means of waging war which will win a conflict by killing the enemy while eliminating casualties on our side, is what Jenkins calls "fool's gold," explaining: "Obama (and David Cameron) are briefed that they are the no-hands war of the future, safe, easy, clean, 'precision targetted.' No one on our side need get hurt. Someone else can do the dirty work on the ground."

Blowback

In a second commentary, a former Obama advisor has written a lengthy analysis, "The costs and consequences of drone warfare," published in the January 2013 issue of the prestigious Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs) journal *International Affairs*. Michael Boyle, a member of Obama's counter-terrorism advisory team during the 2008 Presidential campaign, who now teaches at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, puts even more emphasis on the "blow-

back" from the drone campaign, opening with an anecdote about a Pakistani national, prosecuted in Manhattan in 2010, for attempting to set off a bomb in Times Square; he told the court that this was in retaliation for U.S. drone strikes which "kill women, children; they kill everybody."

Obama has abandoned his 2008 campaign pledge to end the war on terror and restore respect for the rule of law, Boyle says. "Instead, he has been just as ruthless and indifferent to the rule of law as his predecessor." Boyle notes that the only change in U.S. counter-terrorism policy has been a shift in tone and emphasis. "While President Bush issued a call to arms to defend 'civilisation' against the threat of terrorism, President Obama has waged his war on terror in the shadows, using drone strikes, special operations and sophisticated surveillance to fight a brutal covert war against al-Qaeda and other Islamist networks."

Instead of addressing the legality and ethics of drone strikes, as many other studies have done, Boyle makes the case that, in his words, "the Obama administration's growing reliance on drone strikes has adverse strategic effects that have not been properly weighed against the tactical gains associated with killing terrorists." Primary among these adverse effects, are that they deepen anti-American sentiment and create new recruits for Islamist movements that are attempting to overthrow the governments with which the U.S. is nominally allied. In fact, the U.S. is undermining the stability and legitimacy of these allied governments, which are seen as impotent in the face of the U.S. killing of both militants and civilians on those governments' sovereign territory.

In Pakistan, for example, the widespread perception of high civilian casualties from U.S. drone strikes has increased hatred toward both the U.S. and the Pakistani government, and has multiplied the ranks of their enemies. Boyle notes that the drone strikes have given militant networks "a recruiting boost as the carnage has encouraged relatives and friends of the victims to join the ranks of the TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) or other militant groups to fight the U.S. or the Pakistani

government, holding the latter complicit in their deaths."

Boyle also points to the case of Yemen, where in 2010, the Obama Administration described al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as encompassing several hundred al-Qaeda members. But by mid-2012, that number had risen to several thousand.

While the Obama Administration and its allies point to the increasing "effectiveness" of drone strikes, Boyle takes sharp issue with their assessment. "Drones are only 'effective' if they contribute to achieving U.S. strategic goals in a region, a fact often lost in analyses that point only to body counts as a measure of their worthiness," Boyle writes. "More generally, arguments in favor of drones tend to present only one side of the ledger, measuring losses for groups like al-Qaeda and the Taliban without considering how many new recruits they gain as a result of the escalation of drone strikes. *They ignore the fact that drones have replaced Guantanamo Bay as the number one recruiting tool for al-Qaeda today*" (emphasis added).

In a similar vein, Robert Grenier, a former CIA station chief in Pakistan, who headed the CIA's Counter-Terrorism Center from 2004 to 2006, has also pointed out the folly of the drone policy, and its counterproductive effects. "We have gone a long way down the road of creating a situation where we are creating more enemies than we are removing from the battlefield," Grenier stated (as quoted by antiwar.com in early January): "We are already there with regards to Pakistan and Afghanistan."

Lessons of History

Americans, having been told over and over that drone strikes are "surgically precise," and kill only terrorists, are largely ignorant of what is being done in their name. The reality is quite the opposite: Very few "high-value targets" have been killed by drones. As Boyle points out, most of those targetted are low-level militants or insurgents.

Often, many studies have pointed out, the CIA or the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) doesn't know whom they are killing. On-the-ground intelligence in Pakistan, Yemen, or Somalia, is very sparse; hence the targeting is often based on what is thought to be a suspicious pattern of behavior (so-called "signature strikes"). Further, anyone in the vicinity of a suspected terrorist is deemed to be a terrorist or "militant" as well. The problem of counting civilian casualties has been deftly avoided by the Obama Administration's declared assumption that any military-age male killed is automatically a "militant."

That sleight-of-hand may work on Americans, but it doesn't fool Pakistanis or Yemenis.

An article in the Oct. 12, 2012 issue of *EIR*[1] quoted from the study "Living Under Drones," published in September 2012 by the Stanford University and New York University Law Schools, which documented how the gruesome reality on the ground sharply contrasts with the sanitized descriptions of drone strikes fed to the U.S. population by the Obama Administration and the news media.

"The missiles fired from drones kill or injure in several ways, including through incineration, shrapnel, and the release of powerful blast waves capable of crushing internal organs," the Stanford study reported. "Those who do survive drone strikes often suffer disfiguring burns and shrapnel wounds, limb amputations, as well as vision and hearing loss."

EIR continued: "One case study given in the Stanford study, is that of the bombing of a large gathering of individuals, largely community leaders and tribal elders, gathered for a *jirga*—a council—in North Waziristan, convened to resolve a dispute over a local mine. Four Taliban members, whose presence was considered necessary for the dispute to be resolved, were in attendance. This was a government-sanctioned meeting, and local military authorities had been notified of it in advance. Nonetheless, the gathering was hit by a series of missiles, killing 42 and injuring dozens of others. One witness recalled that 'everything was devastated. There were pieces—body pieces—lying around. There was lots of flesh and blood.' Family members were unable to identify the body parts scattered around; one said that all he could do, was 'collect pieces of flesh and put them in a coffin.'"

The Stanford/NYU study also described, in dramatic detail, the sheer psychological terror of living under constant drone surveillance and the threat of missile strikes. One Pakistani man described the "wave of terror" which sweeps the community whenever drones are heard overhead: "Children, grown-up people, women, they are terrified.... They scream in terror." Another said: "They're always over us, and you never know when they're going to strike and attack."

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1. Edward Spannaus, "Obama's Drone Killing Spree Exposed."

'Air Terrorism' in the 1930s

Americans once had a different attitude, than that held today. As *EIR* reported in a 2003 study on air power,[2] during the 1930s, there was an extensive public debate in the U.S. over the use of air power, which was commonly termed "air terrorism." Although the use of air power as means of spreading terror was pioneered by the British, almost as soon as manned flight was developed (see the writings of H.G. Wells), by the 1930s, the military use of air power was associated in the American mind with images of fascists bombing cities and civilians: Italy bombing Ethiopia; Italians and Germans bombing Spanish republican strongholds; and the Japanese bombing the Chinese.

Bombing of cities and civilian population centers was viewed as morally repugnant and counterproductive. An article from the period, in the *Saturday Evening Post*, attacking the use of "air terrorism," declared: "Terrorism was given its trial during the [First] World War, and only wasted military resources and brought on counter-terrorism."

One military officer, reflecting traditional military doctrine, cited in the Oct. 31, 2003 *EIR* article (see footnote 2), stated at that time that the problem with air power was that it "can take nothing. It can hold nothing. It cannot stand on the ground and fight." (Note an echo of this traditionalist view, in the Simon Jenkins commentary cited above.)

Until close to the end of World War II, the United States refrained from bombing German cities, as the British routinely did (and not only in retaliation for German bombing—Winston Churchill ordered the bombing of German cities months before the Germans retaliated in what became known as the "Battle of Britain"). The U.S. policy was to strike the enemy's industrial infrastructure; the British policy, so brutally expressed by Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, was to attack the morale of industrial *workers* by bombing their homes, preferably with incendiary weapons.

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, established in 1944 to assess the effectiveness of the allied bombing campaign, found that, in fact, the British bombing of cities did not cause the morale of the German population to crumble; on the contrary, it found that the German people showed "surprising resistance to the terror and hardships of repeated bomb attacks." The lesson should be clear: Under conditions of extreme adversity, people pull together, and are most likely to direct their anger at those bombing them and act accordingly. And particularly in the cases of Pakistan and Yemen—countries with which the United States is *not* at war—the resulting anger and hatred for those raining down missiles from the air is most easily expressed by joining those who are already fighting the United States: al-Qaeda and associated organizations.

Al-Qaeda's Ally in the White House

EIR has elsewhere documented how Barack Obama and his British controllers are, in reality, allied with al-Qaeda, both in Libya and in Syria; the so-called "democratic opposition" which is engaged in overthrowing the heads of state in those countries, is indeed the very same terrorists whom Obama claims to be fighting in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and so on.

So now it turns out, that Obama is not only al-Qaeda's firmest ally, but he is also their very best recruiter.

The Al-Qaeda Executive

Financed and deployed by the British-Saudi Empire, al-Qaeda has been protected by the Obama Administration to accomplish the Empire's global war. In this feature video, LaRouchePAC documents President Obama's use of the al-Qaeda networks to overthrow Qaddafi in Libya, and to carry out bloody regime-change against Assad in Syria, by the same forces who attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi.

www.larouchepac.com

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2. Edward Spannaus, "Shock and Awe: Terror Bombing, from Wells and Russell to Cheney," *EIR*, Oct. 31, 2003.