



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 1, 2013

## Drone War Escalates; Blowback Breeds New Enemies

While millions of Americans celebrated the birth of the Prince of Peace, agents of the federal government were delivering death by remote control overseas.

On Friday, December 28, for example, five people were killed and three others injured in a U.S. drone attack on a house in the Mana Gurbaz area of the remote and mountainous Shawal Valley in Pakistan's North Waziristan Agency.



According to [a report filed by Pakistan's \*The News International\*](#):

Official and tribal sources said the drone fired four missiles and pounded a house in the forest-covered Shawal Valley, sited 90 kilometres northwest of Miranshah, the headquarters of North Waziristan.

Witnesses indicate that "it was for the first time that a drone carried out [a] missile attack in the cloudy and rainy weather in the volatile tribal region." Chances are it won't be the last.

One official reports that the death toll from the drone strike could increase if those victims wounded in the attack die as a result of their injuries. "There was heavy snowfall in Shawal [V]alley when the drone fired missiles and targeted a house," the unnamed official told *The News International*.

Given the callous and indiscriminate approach of the Obama administration to the names and numbers of those assassinated in the name of "national security," it is not surprising that "there was no immediate information about the identity of those killed in the drone attack."

Naturally, the White House promises that those targeted by the Predators are militants determined to harm Americans. But given the disregard for discrimination in the drone strikes, how many of those killed were innocent bystanders? How many of the actual "targets" were themselves innocent or at least had no demonstrable ties to terrorist organizations? This question will never be known with certainty because the president alone serves as judge, jury, and executioner — and does not believe he is obliged to provide evidence to the American people.

In fact, it would be very naïve to believe the targeted assassination of an innocent person (such as American teenager Abdulrahman al-Awlaki) was an unfortunate miscalculation. When the judicial and executive powers of government are consolidated and restraints on the exercise of power are cast aside, it can be expected — based both on our knowledge of history and on the nature of man — that power will be abused and no one's rights or life will be safe from elimination by despots.

On Christmas Eve, as many Americans prepared to open presents, some opened *Foreign Policy* and read the following [harrowing story of a "botched drone strike"](#) in Yemen carried out on September 2:

The villagers who rushed to the road, cutting through rocky fields in central Yemen, found the dead strewn around a burning sport utility vehicle. The bodies were dusted with white powder — flour and sugar, the witnesses said — that the victims were bringing home from market when the aircraft attacked. A torched woman clutched her daughter in a lifeless embrace. Four severed heads



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littered the pavement.

“The bodies were charred like coal. I could not recognize the faces,” said Ahmed al-Sabooli, 22, a farmer whose parents and 10-year-old sister were among the dead. “Then I recognized my mother because she was still holding my sister in her lap. That is when I cried.”

In a [Christmas Eve Washington Post report](#), anonymous officials of the government of the United States admitted that the brutal mass murder of 12 innocent civilians (three of whom were children) was carried out by “a Defense Department aircraft, either a drone or a fixed-wing airplane.”

That’s it. The U.S.-dependent Yemeni regime remarked that the drone-delivered deaths were the result of an “accident.”

What isn’t an accident is the targeting by Yemenis, Pakistanis, and others weary of constant bombings of Americans and those perceived to be aiding them. It is a deadly development known as blowback.

“You want us to stay quiet while our wives and brothers are being killed for no reason. This attack is the real terrorism,” said Mansoor al-Maweri, whom [CNN reports](#) as being “near the scene of the strike” that “accidentally” killed 15 innocent men, women, and children in Yemen in September.

Then there was this from “an activist” who lives near the site of the massacre: “I would not be surprised if a hundred tribesmen joined the lines of al Qaeda as a result of the latest drone mistake,” said Nasr Abdullah. “This part of Yemen takes revenge very seriously.”

[Reuters explains](#) that “Western diplomats in Sanaa say al Qaeda is a threat to Yemen and the rest of the world.” An argument can be made that a bigger threat to the world is the United States’ daily drone attacks that destroy our own dedication to the rule of law and serve as effective recruiting tool for those seeking revenge for the killing.

The former CIA Pakistan station chief agrees. Speaking of the rapid expansion of the drone war in Yemen, [Robert Grenier told The Guardian \(U.K.\)](#):

That brings you to a place where young men, who are typically armed, are in the same area and may hold these militants in a certain form of high regard. If you strike them indiscriminately you are running the risk of creating a terrific amount of popular anger. They have tribes and clans and large families. Now all of a sudden you have a big problem.... I am very concerned about the creation of a larger terrorist safe haven in Yemen.

We have gone a long way down the road of creating a situation where we are making more enemies than we are removing from the battlefield. We are already there with regard to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

A recent [New York Times story written by Declan Walsh](#) chronicles the case of blowback in Pakistan and how “militant enforcers,” motivated by the CIA’s covert identification of drone targets, have taken to tracking and torturing those suspected of aiding the American operatives in carrying out their murderous missions.

For several years now, militant enforcers have scoured the tribal belt in search of informers who help the CIA find and kill the spy agency’s jihadist quarry. The militants’ technique — often more witch hunt than investigation — follows a well-established pattern. Accused tribesmen are abducted from homes and workplaces at gunpoint and tortured. A sham religious court hears their case, usually declaring them guilty. Then they are forced to speak into a video camera.



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The taped confessions, which are later distributed on CD, vary in style and content. But their endings are the same: execution by hanging, beheading, or firing squad.

Such sham proceedings are a mockery of legitimate justice and are themselves as reprehensible and unconscionable as the indiscriminate delivery of Hellfire missiles by U.S. drones. Remarkably, however, the suspected CIA co-conspirators are at least afforded some due process, albeit with a pre-determined and deadly outcome. The same cannot be said of those marked for assassination by the U.S. government. As [Kevin Gosztola writes](#):

Now, there is one point worth making: as horrifying as the torture and killings of alleged informers in Pakistan might be, those targeted by these militant groups are afforded more justice than targets of US drone attacks.

How are the militant witch hunts any worse than the Obama administration's Star Chamber killing by committee?

Facts reveal that the prosecution of the drone war in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and North Africa is [creating more enemies than it is destroying](#). Al-Qaeda couldn't cook up a more effective recruitment program than the U.S. drone war that is allegedly aimed at eliminating the "terrorist" organization.

For President Obama and those pulling the triggers on the joysticks guiding the missiles toward their human targets, "suspected militant" means (presumably) "all military-age males in a strike zone." For those of us more concerned with the Constitution and with the rule of law than the president, "suspected militant" means nothing other than a person not charged with any crime, not afforded even the most perfunctory due process protections, but summarily executed upon order of the president anyway. In this way, we are no better than those we kill in the name of safety.



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