



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on June 20, 2012

Taliban Commander Blocks Polio Vaccines Until Drone Strikes End

[The Taliban is refusing to administer polio vaccines](#) to children until President Obama suspends the drone program that has killed nearly 3,000 people along the Pakistan/Afghanistan border, [including over 30 in the month of June.](#)



Just days before the scheduled inoculation of 161,000 children, the tribal leader in North Waziristan issued the edict cancelling the event. As readers will recognize, North Waziristan has been the site of many if not most of the airstrikes carried out by the American drones ostensibly in search of “militants” suspected of hiding out in that mountainous region.

The order was issued by Taliban commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur. Bahadur said the final decision to ban vaccinations was made by the shura-e-mujahedeen, a coalition council representing several factions operating in the area, including the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

A [story published by the New York Times](#) reports the health risks resulting from the Taliban’s policy statement.

The announcement, made over the weekend, is a blow to polio vaccination efforts in Pakistan, one of just three countries where the disease is still endemic, accounting for 198 new cases last year — the highest rate in the world, followed by Afghanistan and Nigeria.

The tribal belt, which has suffered decades of poverty and conflict, is the largest reservoir of the disease. A UNICEF spokesman said health workers had hoped to reach 161,000 children younger than five in a vaccination drive scheduled to begin on Wednesday.

That is likely to be cancelled, at a time when officials felt they were making progress. So far this year, Pakistan has recorded 22 new polio cases, compared with 52 in the same period last year.

While the use of drones to target and kill suspected terrorists is controversial at home and abroad, there is another aspect of the story that likely played just as large a role in the Taliban’s decision.

A Pakistani doctor who was leading the drive to inoculate the region’s children against polio was recently [sentenced by a tribal court to 33 years in prison](#) for allegedly having assisted the CIA in determining the location of Osama bin Laden’s residence in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Dr. Shakil Afridi ran a vaccination program in that city that was allegedly just a front for a CIA operation to obtain a DNA sample that would verify bin Laden’s presence in the city.

A senior CIA official is quoted in the *New York Times* piece as saying that the effort was unsuccessful. Regardless, the Taliban holds up the Afridi/CIA connection as the real impediment to the inoculations.



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That and the near constant bombardment of the area with Hellfire missiles launched from American drones.

“Almost every resident of North Waziristan has become a mental patient because of the drone strikes, which are worse than polio,” the statement claims. “On one hand, the U.S. spends millions of dollars to eliminate polio, while on the other hand it kills hundreds with the help of its slave, Pakistan.”

Despite Bahadur’s description of the relationship between the United States and Pakistan, recently the strength of those ties has significantly weakened as a result of the Obama administration’s [refusal to apologize formally for the death of 24 Pakistani soldiers](#) killed by a Predator drone strike carried out in the North Waziristan area last November.

In reality, though, the U.S. government acts as though it believes it needs neither the permission nor the assistance of Pakistan in the execution of its deadly operations in the area. President Obama has been very successful in his use of unmanned drones to target, track, and kill those branded as enemies of the state, despite the outcry at home and abroad against the exercise of such dictatorial prerogatives.

If the embargo on inoculation continues, the number of casualties in the never ending “War on Terror” may soon include hundreds of thousands of innocent children who will suffer the ravages of a disease that is all but eradicated in much of the world.

Photo of Pakistani child getting a polio vaccine: AP Images



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