

Six-month update: US covert actions in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia

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An MQ-9 Reaper waits to take flight (Photo: US Air Force/Staff Sgt John Bainter)

Drone strikes restart in [Pakistan](#) after a pause of almost six months.

US drone strike casualty rate in [Yemen](#) jumps to 8.3 people killed in each attack on average.

Kenyan jets strike al Shabaab in [Somalia](#).

The [Naming the Dead](#) project approaches 700 names.

Pakistan

June 2014 actions

Total CIA strikes in June: **3**
Total killed in strikes in June: **14-24**

All actions 2004 – June 30 2014

Total	Obama	strikes:	335
Total	US	strikes since 2004:	386
Total	reported	killed:	2,310-3,743
Civilians	reported	killed:	416-957
Children	reported	killed:	168-202
Total	reported	injured:	1,091-1,647

[For the Bureau's full Pakistan databases click here.](#)

CIA [drone strikes in Pakistan](#)'s tribal area [resumed on June 11](#) with an attack that killed at least four people. The first attack since [December 25 2013](#), this brought to an end the longest pause in drone strikes of Obama's presidency.

Within hours drones attacked again, killing 6-10 people [shortly after midnight](#) on June 12. Some reports said this was [a follow-up strike](#) on the same site that targeted rescuers. A third attack killed at least four more people [on June 18](#).

After the first strike, the Foreign Ministry issued a [statement](#) condemning the violation of its sovereignty. However, a [senior Pakistani official told Reuters](#): 'The attacks were launched with the express approval of the Pakistan government and army.'

During the almost six-month hiatus in strikes, the Pakistani government held peace talks with the Pakistan Taliban (TTP), an armed group based in the tribal agency of North Waziristan. These were interrupted by terrorist attacks and retaliatory Pakistan Air Force strikes on the tribal regions. A [Bureau investigation](#) found that 15 Pakistani air strikes between December and June 15 reportedly [killed 291-540 people](#), including 16-112 civilians.

The peace talks conclusively ended after a June 8 attack in which gunmen and suicide bombers stormed Karachi airport. At least [34 people were killed](#) in the ensuing gun battle, including 10 attackers.

The TTP and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), also based in North Waziristan, claimed responsibility.

On [June 15](#), the Pakistani government announced a long-awaited military offensive against the TTP in North Waziristan.

More than [450,000 people](#) have fled their homes in North Waziristan since late May. On June 19 the Pakistan government said it would not ask [aid agencies, including the UN](#), for help handling the refugee crisis. A week later the [World Health Organisation warned](#) the mass exodus risked increasing the spread of polio [beyond the tribal belt](#) - currently Pakistan's worst affected area.



Nek Mohammed speaks during a tribal jirga in Pakistan (REUTERS/Kamran Wazir)

June 17 marked the tenth anniversary of the first drone strike in Pakistan. In June 2004, CIA drones killed [Nek Mohammed](#) and at least five others, including two children. On the anniversary, the Bureau published an [interactive timeline](#) of key milestones in the campaign, and [eyewitness accounts](#) of this strike. One local told the Bureau he heard a buzzing: ‘There was some noise then from the east, a flash of light came. There was a big blast.’

Also in June, [a task force](#) of legal experts, retired military and national security officials convened by the Stimson Center, a Washington-based think-tank, published a [year-long analysis](#) of the US use of armed drones for targeted killing.

The report called for more transparency over drone strikes and voiced concerns that the Obama administration’s ‘heavy reliance on targeted killings as a pillar of US counter-terrorism strategy ... risks increasing instability and escalating conflicts.’ The authors also concluded

drones do not 'cause disproportionate civilian casualties or turn killing into a "video-game".'

Six-monthly trends

The absence of reported drone strikes in the first five months of 2014 led [some to question](#) whether the campaign in Pakistan had ended entirely.

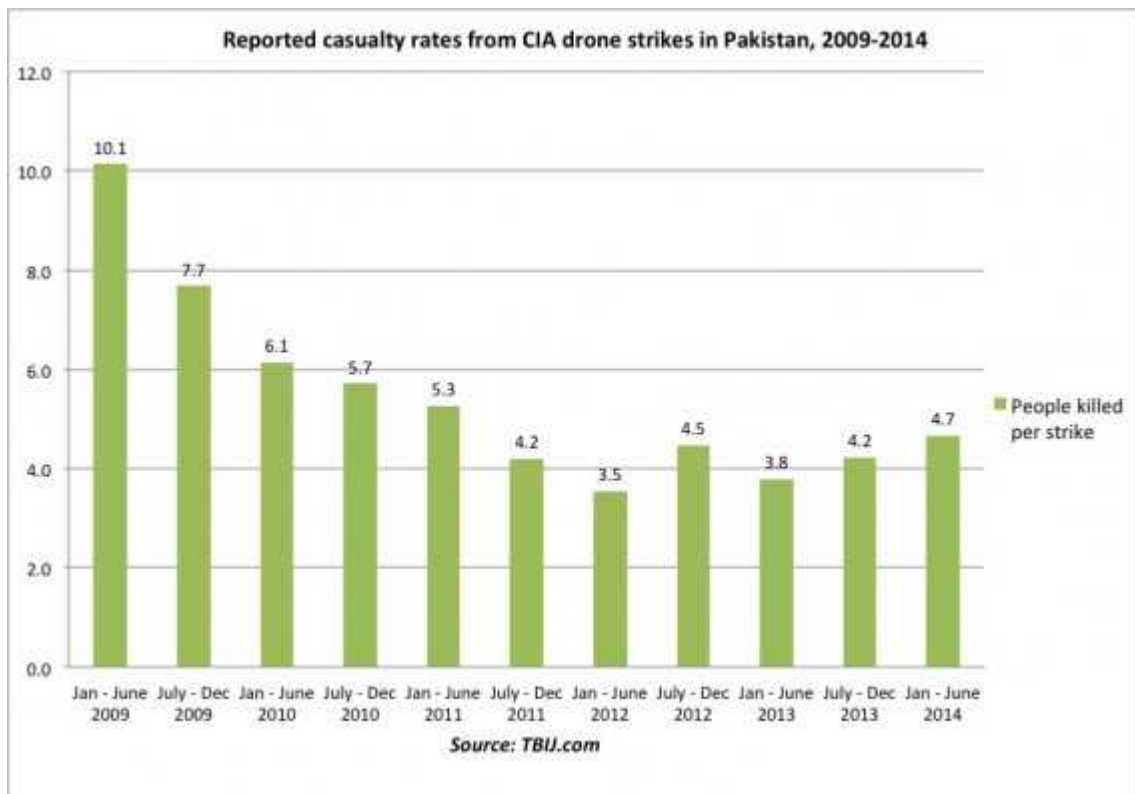
Several factors may have contributed to the lengthy hiatus. The Pakistani government spent the first half of the year in often fractious peace negotiations with the TTP. A source [close to the talks](#) told the Bureau that Islamabad had asked the US to stop drone strikes during the process. All hope of the talks succeeding ended with the TTP's joint attack on Karachi airport on June 8; drone strikes returned days later.

Drones [reportedly continued flying over the tribal regions](#), and US officials said the administration [reserved the right](#) to use lethal force if a target presented itself. It is possible the CIA may have decided to pursue a [more limited list](#) of targets.

The campaign may have been affected by the scaling-down of the US intelligence network over the border in Afghanistan. CIA [border posts and listening stations](#) are closing ahead of the drawdown and AP reported the CIA is ending [payments to its proxy militias](#) in the region, which gather human intelligence on targets in Pakistan.

The strikes may also have been constrained by secret negotiations leading up to the May 31 release of Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, the last US prisoner of war. He was exchanged for five members of the [Afghan Taliban held in Guantanamo](#). Bergdahl had been held prisoner in Pakistan's tribal areas by the Haqqani Network, members of which were the target of at least one of June's three strikes.

The year's three strikes so far killed 14-24 people, none of whom were described as civilians. This is the smallest reported death toll for a six-month period of drone strikes in Pakistan since the first half of 2006, when 13-22 people reportedly died.



The average number of people killed in CIA drone strikes in Pakistan during Obama's presidency.

However the casualty rate – the average number of people killed per strike – for the first half of 2014 is 4.7. This rate has hovered between around 3.5 and 5 for the past three years, after peaking at more than 10 in the first half of 2009.

Yemen

June 2014 actions

Confirmed	US	drone	strikes:	1
Further	reported/possible	US	strike events:	2
Total	reported	killed in	US operations:	5-10
Civilians reported killed in US strikes: 0				

All actions 2002 – June 30 2014*

Confirmed	US	drone	strikes:	65-77
Total	reported	killed:		339-494
Civilians	reported	killed:		34-83

Children reported killed: 7
Reported injured: **78-196**

Possible extra US drone strikes: **95-114**
Total reported killed: **318-509**
Civilians reported killed: **24-48**
Children reported killed: **6-9**
Reported injured: **85-118**

All other US covert operations: **14-79**
Total reported killed: **150-386**
Civilians reported killed: **60-89**
Children reported killed: **25-27**
Reported injured: **22-115**

[Click here for the full Yemen data.](#)

** All but one of these actions have taken place during Obama's presidency. Reports of incidents in Yemen often conflate individual strikes. The range we have recorded in US drone strikes and covert operations reflects this.*

June saw one confirmed drone strike in Yemen, killing 5-6 people, and two further attacks that may have been drone strikes. One of these possible strikes, on [June 4](#), killed 3-4 people. Casualties were unknown in the other.

Only two of the dead were identified, both described as members of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). '[Tribal sources](#)' told reporters that the June 4 strike killed **Jafar al Shabwani**, describing him as a mid-level AQAP commander. He was the fourth man with this name to have reportedly died in a drone strike this year, but their relation to each other is unclear.

The [confirmed US drone strike](#), on June 13 or 14, killed 'leading AQAP figure' **Musaed al Habshi al Barasi al Awlaqi** and two unnamed Saudis, along with at least two other unidentified casualties.

The US added alleged AQAP member **Shawqi Ali Ahmed al Badani** to [a US sanctions list](#). According to [unnamed officials](#), al Badani was

the target of a disastrous [US drone strike](#) on a wedding procession in December 2013.



US citizen Anwar al Awlaki, killed in a drone strike in September 2011 (YouTube screengrab)

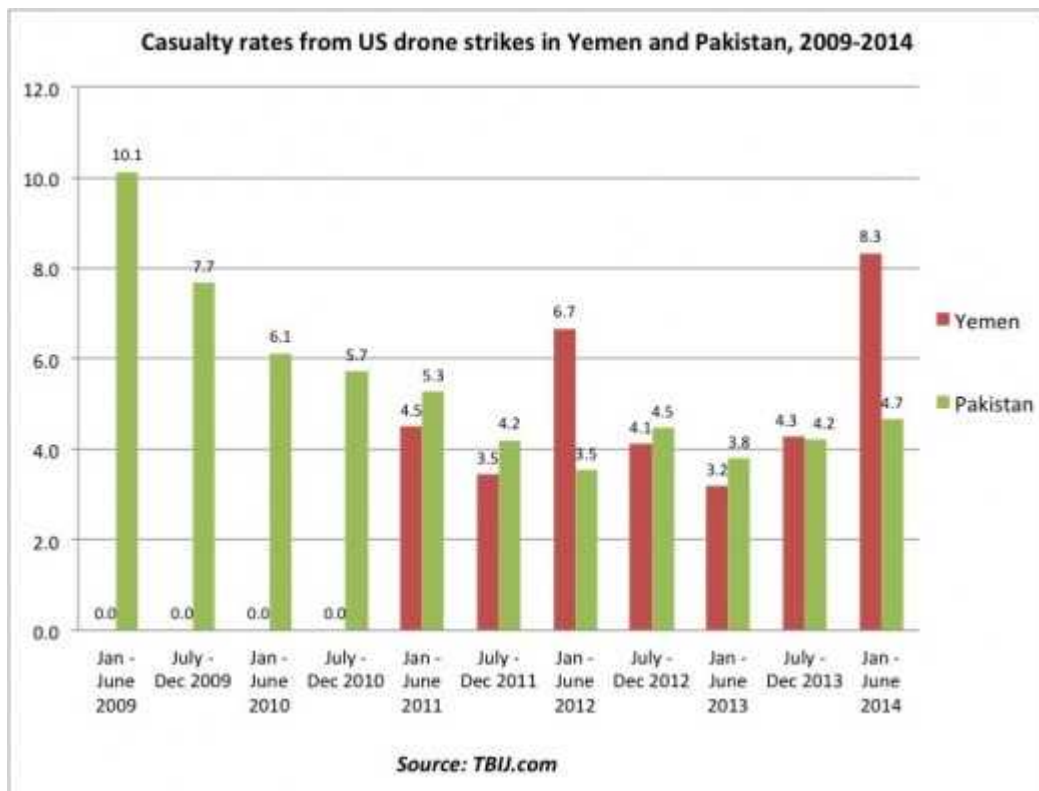
On June 23 the US government released, with redactions, a secret memo setting out legal justifications for killing a US citizen, Anwar al Awlaki. The release [met with mixed reactions](#) from national security analysts and legal experts.

June also saw the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) overrun major cities in Iraq. So far Washington has refused Baghdad's requests for airstrikes on ISIS fighters, but has started flying [armed drones over the country](#). And there are now more than [180 US special forces](#) in the country.

Six-monthly trends

Six confirmed drone strikes since January this year have reportedly killed at least 50 people, including four civilians. This makes it the bloodiest six-month period for drone strikes in the country since the first half of 2012, when the US launched at least 21 confirmed drone strikes, killing upwards of 140 people.

While more people died overall in January to June 2012, this year's drone strikes have had higher death tolls. The casualty rate for the past six months was 8.3 people killed per strike – the highest yet recorded in Yemen, and almost double that recorded in the second half of last year.



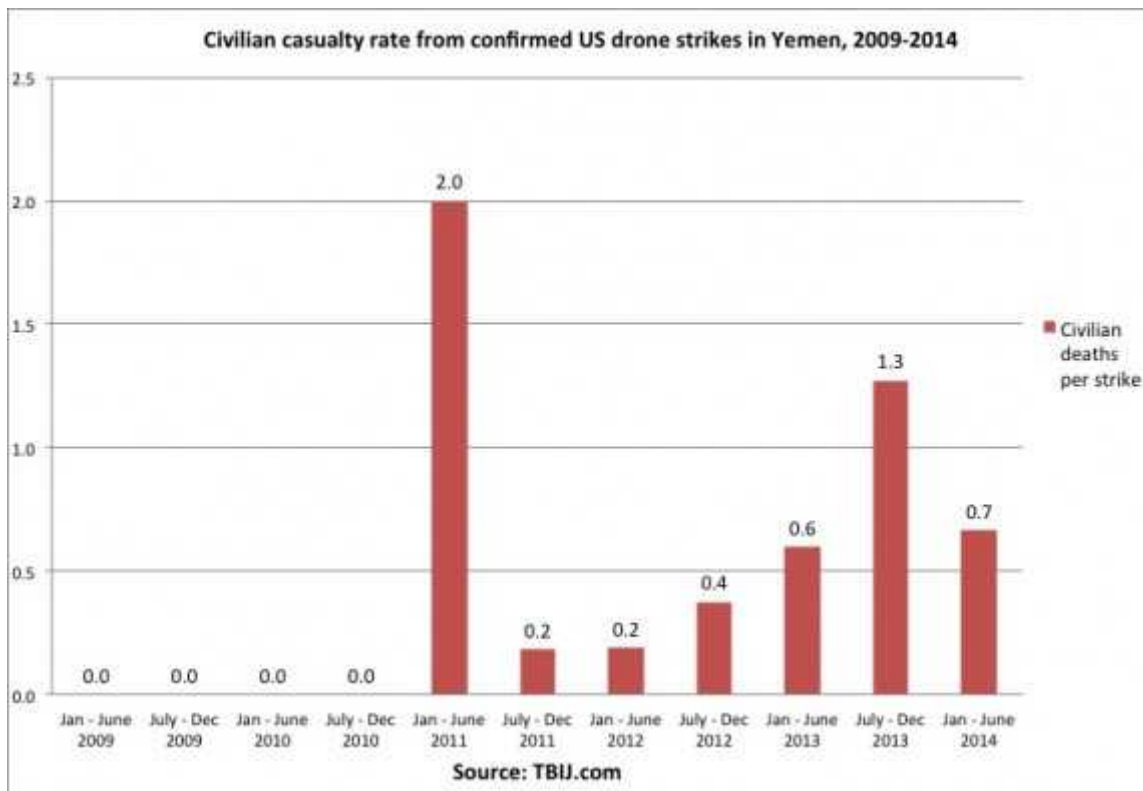
The average number of people killed per US drone strike in Yemen and Pakistan during Obama's presidency.

Since 2011 the casualty rate in Pakistan and Yemen has been at a similar level. But in the first half of 2014, as in the first half of 2012, the casualty rate in Yemen spiked. These periods both coincide with Yemeni government attempts to oust AQAP from territory it had seized.

The increased casualty rate this year is because a cluster of attacks on [April 19 and April 20](#) killed at least 37 people.

This analysis examines only strikes considered confirmed by the Bureau – those described as drone strikes by three separate credible sources, or those acknowledged by US sources. In the first half of 2012, up to 102 air attacks were reported, so the true number of drone strikes is unknown but may be higher. And in the first half of 2014, the Bureau recorded a further 12 possible drone strikes, killing 18-30.

The civilian casualty rate – the number of civilians killed in each strike on average – fell sharply compared to the previous six months but continued a longer-term upwards trend.



The minimum number of civilians reportedly killed by US drones in Yemen during Obama's presidency.

The high rate in the second half of last year is in large part because [at least eight](#) civilians were killed in the catastrophic wedding party strike on December 12 2013 strike. However, the civilian casualty rate in the first half of this year is more than three times that of the same period in 2012.

This could be due to improved reporting: journalists have, until recently, enjoyed better access to parts of the country than they did in 2011 and 2012, when the areas affected by drone strikes were often under AQAP control.

However journalists' ability to report is now being restricted by the Yemeni government. Journalists have [repeatedly been harassed](#) by the security forces, and the government has [closed media groups](#) owned by the former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. US journalist Adam Baron was expelled from the country, and UK reporter Iona Craig left shortly afterwards. They were the last accredited international journalists living and working in Sanaa.

Somalia

June 2014 actions

Total reported US operations: **0**

All actions 2007 – June 30 2014

US	drone	strikes:	5-8
Total	reported	killed:	10-24
Civilians	reported	killed:	0-1
Children	reported	killed:	0

Reported injured: **2-3**

All	other	US	covert	operations:	8-11
Total		reported		killed:	40-141
Civilians		reported		killed:	7-47
Children		reported		killed:	0-2
Reported			injured:		11-21

[Click here for the Bureau's full data on Somalia.](#)

There were no reported US operations in Somalia for the fifth successive month. However al Shabaab sites came under attack from Kenyan Defence Force jets. Military sources claimed [up to 80](#) alleged militants died, though there were no independent casualty estimates.

The strikes were reportedly in support of the African Union peacekeeping mission, Amisom, which has been trying to roll back al Shabaab control in southern and central Somalia. Amisom has had some success against al Shabaab but a [report by the International Crisis Group](#) predicted it will be a long war against the armed group.

Al Shabaab [killed at least 48 people](#) in a bloodthirsty attack on people watching the World Cup in Mpeketoni, a poor Kenyan coastal town. Scores of al Shabaab fighters poured into the town after dark, targeting a police station and hotels, [reportedly killing men](#) with guns and knives but sparing women and children. Mpeketoni is near the popular tourist destination Lamu. The continuing attacks are [harming Kenya's crucial tourist industry](#),

The attack echoed a 2010 al Shabaab bombing in Kampala, Uganda, which also targeted crowds watching the World Cup. In that attack [more than 70](#) died.

Six-monthly trends

A single drone strike this year killed 2-9 people on January 26. It reportedly targeted Ahmed Abdi Godane, [al Shabaab's leader](#). It later emerged one of Godane's aides, Sahal Iskudhuq, was killed in the attack. Godane had reportedly [met with Iskudhuq that evening](#).



Ethiopian soldiers join the Amisom peacekeeping force in Somalia (Amisom/Flickr)

There have been between five and eight US drone strikes reported in Somalia since the first one in June 2011, a small number compared with Yemen and Pakistan. However, because much of the country remains beyond government control and out of reach for journalists and civil society, it is possible further attacks have gone unreported.

This year [Amisom announced Ethiopia](#) would contribute soldiers to the peacekeeping force. Ethiopia unilaterally invaded Somalia in December 2006 and its occupation was marked by [accusations of war crimes](#).

Amisom have made territorial gains against al Shabaab, but the armed group has continued to launch lethal attacks in the heavily defended green zone around Mogadishu's airport and the presidential palace.

Naming the Dead

This month the Bureau has added 14 names to Naming the Dead project, which identifies those killed in Pakistan drone strikes, taking the number of names published to 698.

These people were killed in June's [second strike](#). This poses a puzzle: there were only 6-10 people reportedly killed by the strike. However it was just hours after the [earlier attack](#), so some of those 14 names could have belonged to those killed in that strike. Alternatively, the extra names could be pseudonyms or aliases.

The Bureau has profiled [Nek Mohammed](#), the local Taliban commander who was the target of the first CIA drone strike in Pakistan, 10 years ago this month.

Additional reporting by [Olivia Rudgard](#).