

Trump Carries on Obama's Legacy with First Drone Deaths

03/03/2017



During his presidential campaign, Trump said that he would continue drone use against terrorist targets and even their families.

U.S. President Donald Trump appears to be continuing Barack Obama's legacy of using deadly unmanned drones in territories where the U.S. is not officially fighting a war. On Thursday, two men were reportedly killed while riding on a motorcycle in northern Pakistan. Al-Qaida also confirmed a drone killed one of its senior leaders in Syria.

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Two men were struck by a missile from a what was believed to be a U.S. drone in a village in the Kurram Agency close to Pakistan's northern border with Afghanistan. The area is known as a tribal area with a weak government presence where Islamist insurgents, including the Taliban and al-Qaida, have been operating for years.

Speaking anonymously to AFP, a local government official said that two "militants" were killed in the strike, but their bodies were beyond recognition so they had not yet been identified. A second official said that "the drone came from Afghanistan and returned after firing two missiles on the motorbike."

A senior Taliban commander said that the two men killed in the attack were from the Haqqani network, a separate group with a complicated alliance with the Taliban. He identified them as

Haqqani commander Saqib Ullah and guard Qari Abdullah.

Drone use in Pakistan has been highly controversial. It has been criticized as a blatant violation of state sovereignty by the U.S., as well as a violation of human rights in the form of extra-judicial killing.

Meanwhile, al-Qaida said in a statement Thursday that a U.S.-led drone strike killed its leader Abu al-Khayr al-Masri on Sunday near Idlib in Syria. Al-Masri had been wanted by the U.S. for close to 19 years.

Over 400 attacks have occurred in Pakistan since the drone program was initiated under President George W. Bush in 2004. Drones have been used to attack targets of the Islamic State group, al-Qaida and the Taliban, along with other groups across Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Somalia. While many militant targets have been killed, civilians have commonly been victims.

According to monitoring organization Reprieve, the U.S. has “used drones to execute without trial some 4,700 people,” and civilians deaths are thought to have reached more than 1,000.

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The attack is the first reported drone attack in Pakistan since Trump was sworn in as U.S. president in January. U.S. officials have yet to comment on Thursday’s strike.

While Obama significantly ramped up the drone program in his first presidential term, Trump has said little about U.S. policy in regard to Pakistan. During his election campaign, Trump boasted that he would continue drone use against terrorist targets and even their families.
