

Scenario 114

DRONE ATTACKS DILEMMA-I:

Pakistani people came to know about [the American] drone attacks on **18th June 2004**, the first known on record at least, a strike which killed 5–8 people including Nek Muhammad Wazir [*a Pashtun military leader*] and two children, near Wana in South Waziristan. Pak-Army initially claimed that the attack was done by them.

The second known drone attack was launched about a year later; on **14th May 2005** two persons were killed including *Haitham al-Yemeni* in a strike near the Pak-Afghan border in North Waziristan. The success in achieving their targets without any loss brought a chain of such strikes. On **5th November 2005**, a strike destroyed the house of Al-Qaeda's 3rd in command, Abu Hamza Rabia killing his wife, three children and four others. Rabia himself was not there but on **30th November 2005**, in another attack in Asoray, near Miran Shah of North Waziristan, Abu Hamza Rabia was also killed along with 4 other militants.

[Some sources maintained that Hamza Rabia was not killed on that day of **30th November 2005** but the event had taken place on **4th December 2005** - the rest of the details were same.]

The above missile strike was seen and picked up by one Hayatullah Khan, a journalist from Waziristan **attached with GEO TV**. It proved to be his last assignment in North Waziristan. Khan had filed photos and story showing that US missile killing senior al Qaeda's figure Hamza Rabia. The story had also appeared in an **Urdu daily Ausaf**. His story had contradicted the state's official stance that Rabia had died in a blast caused by explosives located inside the house — the same sort of questions that surrounded the death of Baitullah Mehsud later.

The next day, Khan was abducted and after six months, on **16th June 2006**, his dead body was found near the market in Miran Shah. The corpse was thin and dirty, in the same clothes Khan had been wearing when he was abducted. Sailab Mehsud, then president of the Tribal Union of Journalists, told the CPJ:

"We know that the government had a hand in this. A message has been sent that we should stop doing our work. For us, the post - Hayat period will only be more dangerous."

Mehsud was right about future risks. Since Hayatullah Khan's death, at least 13 more Pakistani journalists had been killed on duty, five of them murdered. Hayatullah Khan's younger brother was also killed in late 2006, while his wife was killed in a bomb attack in 2007 just to eliminate the possible evidence of Hayatullah's brutal murder.

The unrest amongst the whole Pakistani nation was seen on **13th January 2006** when an airstrike killed 18 civilians, in Damadola area of Bajaur agency but allegedly missed Ayman al-Zawahri; five women, eight men, and five children were amongst the dead.

After about nine months, on **30th October 2006** another air strike through an armed helicopter was aimed at Chenagai to target Ayman al-Zawahri but destroyed a *madrassa* [religious school] in Bajaur killing 84 children. Pak-Army once again claimed it their own activity

urging that the militants were providing weaponry training to the youngsters of Al Qaeda & Taliban there.

Khyber PK's one provincial minister Sirajul Haq [*later elected as Ameer Jamat e Islami*] got furious declaring it '**an open American aggression**' as they were innocent school children. In all major cities of Pakistan, thousands took part in protests against Pakistan's alliance with the US, chanting "Death to Bush" and burning American flags.

On 24th February 2007; a document – "**Killing of journalists**" – was made public after a meeting between Interior Secretary Syed Kamal Shah and a delegation of the International Federation of Journalists in Islamabad. It was, inter alia, managed by Syed Kamal Shah as a pack of lies, given in that report that '*the government believed the high profile murder of tribal journalist Hayatullah Khan was the result of a monetary dispute.*'

[Interior Secretary Kamal Shah was openly declared 'Liar of the first order' then by the media while his person was widely discussed in those days' live TV talks. He was blamed for extending threats to the journalists on various counts.]

Pakistan repeatedly protested drone attacks as an infringement of its sovereignty and because civilian deaths were having been resulted, including women and children, which had further angered Pakistan's new PPP government and people.

On 4th October 2008; *the Washington Post* reported that there was a secret deal between the US and Pakistan allowing these drone attacks – as those were flown from a Pakistani base. Though Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi had denied it but the news was based on facts; Jacobabad and Shamsi Airbase, 190 miles (310 km) southwest of Quetta and 30 miles (48 km) from the Afghan border were earmarked for drones.

The drone attacks continued, despite repeated requests made by Pakistani government through different channels. TTP's Baitullah Mehsud, while claiming responsibility for the 2009 Lahore Police School attacks, stated that it was in retaliation for the drone attacks. Then, Pakistani intelligence had agreed to secretly provide information to the US on Baitullah Mehsud's whereabouts while publicly the Pakistan's PPP government continued to condemn the attacks.

The India - friendly senior US officials were pushing President Obama for extending the strikes into Quetta in Balochistan against the Quetta *Shura*. Mike Mullen had told the media that in an effort to strengthen trust with Pakistan US was sharing drone surveillance data with Pakistan and the US defense budget for 2011 asked for a 75% increase in 'drone funds' to enhance the drone operations. The media had noted that:

"During the Bush administration, there was drone attack in Pakistan every 43 days; during the first two years of the Obama admin, there was a drone strike every four days."

The US sources confirmed that President Obama had broadened the base of drone attacks to include targets seeking to destabilize Pakistani civilian government; thus the attacks of 14th – 16th February 2009 were against training camps run by Baitullah Mehsud. **On 25th February 2009** Leon Panetta, Director CIA, reiterated that the strikes would continue.

The Washington Times of 4th March 2009 confirmed that the drones were targeting Baitullah Mehsud and **President Obama had given green signal expanding the drone strikes to include Balochistan.** The US officials had briefed their President that the drone strikes had killed nine of al Qaeda's 20 top commanders. Further, that many top Taliban and al Qaeda leaders, as a result of the strikes, had fled to Quetta or even further to Karachi.

Till May 2009, there was no doubt left that the US was sharing drone intelligence with Pakistan and that was why Leon Panetta had once more reiterated **on 19th May 2009** that the US intended to continue the drone attacks – and with more intensity.

In December 2009 expansion of the drone attacks was authorized by the US President to parallel the decision to send 30,000 more American troops to Afghanistan. From Pakistan there was also a green signal for that in the back drop of Taliban's siege & attack on GHQ **on 10th October 2009**.

FATA PEOPLE WELCOME DRONES ?

On 28th April 2009; President Zardari, through Pakistan's Consul General to the US, Aqil Nadeem, had asked the US **'...to hand over control of its drones in Pakistan to his government. If the US government insists on our true cooperation, then they should also be helping us in fighting those terrorists.'**

But the suggestion was rejected by the US who were worried that Pakistanis would leak information about targets to militants.

In an analysis published in **Daily Times on 2nd January 2010**; Farhat Taj challenged the view that the local people of Waziristan were against the drone attacks – rather they supported the attacks and see the drones as their 'liberators' from the clutches of Taliban. She wrote:

'The people of Waziristan are suffering a brutal kind of occupation under the Taliban and al Qaeda. It is in this context that they would welcome anyone, Americans, Israelis, Indians or even the devil, to rid them of the Taliban and al Qaeda.'

The world ultimately got known that *'...they are not going to advertise that, but that's what they are doing.'* A study called **'The Year of the Drone'** published in February 2010 by the New America Foundation found that from a total of 114 drone strikes in Pakistan between 2004 and early 2010, approximately between 834 and 1,216 individuals had been killed. About two thirds of whom were thought to be militants and one third were civilians.

On 25th March 2010, the US State Department legal advisor Harold Koh came with surprising statement that:

'The drone strikes are legal because of the right to self-defense; the US is involved in an armed conflict with al Qaeda, the Taliban, and their affiliates and therefore may use force consistent with self-defense under international law.'

It remains a fact that till early 2011 the US used to fax notifications to the ISI detailing the dates and general areas of future drone attack operations. The ISI used to send a return fax acknowledging receipt, but not approving the operation. Pakistan used to clear the airspace over the area and on the dates designated in the US fax.

However, after the 2nd May 2011 raid that killed bin Laden, the ISI ceased acknowledging the US faxes, but continued clearing the airspace in the areas where US drones were scheduled to be operating. Perhaps, the US sent the faxes primarily to support legal justification for the drone attacks.

In **March 2011**; the GOC 7th Division of Pak-Army, Maj Gen Ghayur Mehmood delivered a briefing **"Myths and rumours about US predator strikes"** in Miranshah. He said that:

'.....most of those who were killed by the drone strikes were Al Qaeda and Taliban terrorists. Military's official paper on the attacks till 7th March 2011 said that between 2007 and 2011 about 164 predator strikes had been carried out and over 964 terrorists had been killed. Those killed included 793 locals and 171 foreigners. The foreigners included Arabs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Chechens, Filipinos and Moroccans.'

On 28th April 2011, Gen David Petraeus was made Director CIA overseeing the drone attacks – another factor to further inflame relations between the two nations. As per information available from **Washington Post's record as of September 2011**, around 30 Predator and Reaper drones were operating under CIA for Pak-Afghan area of operations. The CIA drones operated under the CIA's Counter - Terrorism Center (CTC), based at CIA's HQ in Langley, Virginia with about 2,000 people on staff at that time.

Till ending 2011, the circumstances were changed. On **9th December 2011**, Pak-Army Chief Gen Kayani issued a directive to shoot down US drones – ***"any object entering into our air space, including US drones, will be treated as hostile and be shot down."***

However, in January 2012, the then ISI Chief Gen Pasha secretly negotiated and signed a pact with Director CIA Gen Petraeus in Qatar to **'re-admit the attacks of guided air-planes on Pakistani soil. He had also agreed to enlarge the CIA presence in Shahbaz air base, near the city of Abbottabad, where Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden was killed in May 2011.'**

On the other side; as per report, published in 2012 from **Stanford and New York University Law School**; US drone strikes were extremely unpopular in Pakistan.

Whereas, the 2012 poll by the **Pew Research Center's Global Attitude Project** found that only 17% of Pakistanis supported drone strikes; and remarkably, among those who professed to know a lot or a little about drones, 97% considered drone strikes a bad policy.

Civilians in Waziristan interviewed for the report believed ***"that the US actively seeks to kill them simply for being Muslims, viewing the drone campaign as a part of a religious crusade against Islam."***

Many professionals working in Waziristan believed that drone strikes encouraged terrorism. The report reflected similar conclusions reached by reporters for *Der Spiegel*, *The New York Times* and CNN.

The **Los Angeles Times** once reported that in North Waziristan a militant group called ***Khorasan Mujahedin*** targeted people suspected of being informants. According to the report, the group kidnapped people from an area suspected of selling information that led to the drone strikes; tortured and killed them, and their videotapes of killings were sold or distributed in markets as warnings to others.

In October 2013, **'The Economist'** continued to find support among locals for the drone attacks as protection against the militants, claiming no civilians were killed this year.

AMERICA's CONFLICTING DATA:

The ***information, released through & confirmed by Pak-Army*** to a parliamentary question, said that no civilian had been killed since January 2012 till October 2013. The drone strategy went successful because 2,160 foreign intruders called as Islamic force were killed since 2008.

The claim caused widespread surprise in the country where the remote controlled aircraft had been widely hated because of the popular belief that they killed tens of civilians in each strike. It also puzzled analysts, media men and human activist organizations many of whom had long assumed Pakistan was helpless in drone attacks strategy of US and its NATO allies.

In fact, it was an interesting turn in the wholesome debate on drones playing havoc with all those anti-drone campaigners who have been arguing that drones kill civilians thus must be stopped. Basic information about the number of civilians and militants killed by drones always remained controversial and highly politicised in Pakistan.

On 14th July 2009, Daniel L. Byman of the **Brookings Institution** stated that '*although accurate data on the results of drone strikes is difficult to obtain, it seemed that ten civilians had died in the drone attacks for every militant killed.*' He suggested that the real answer to halting al-Qaeda's activity in Pakistan would be long-term support of Pakistan's counter - insurgency efforts.

According to a report of the Islamabad based **Conflict Monitoring Center** (CMC), as of 2011, more than 2000 persons were killed, and most of those deaths were of civilians. The CMC termed the CIA drone strikes as an "**assassination campaign turning out to be revenge campaign**", and showed that 2010 was the deadliest year till then regarding casualties resulting from drone attacks, with 134 strikes inflicting over 900 deaths.

According to the **Long War Journal**, as of mid-2011, the drone strikes in Pakistan since 2006 had killed 2,018 militants and 138 civilians. **The New America Foundation** stated in mid-2011 that since 2004 2,551 people were killed in the strikes, with 80% of those militants. The Foundation stated that 95% of those killed in 2010 were militants. As of 2012, 15% of the total people killed by drone strikes were either civilians or unknown. The foundation also stated that in 2012 the rate of civilian and unknown casualties was 2%, whereas the **Bureau of Investigative Journalism** said the rate of civilian casualties for 2012 was 9%.

The **CIA's official figures** claimed that the strikes conducted between May 2010 and August 2011 killed over 600 militants and did not result in any civilian fatalities; this assessment was criticized by Bill Roggio from the **Long War Journal** and other commentators as being unrealistic. An essay in **New York Times** claimed that, as of August 2011, the drone campaign had killed over 2,000 militants and about 50 civilians.

In **February 2012 Associated Press Investigation** found that militants were the main victims of drone strikes in North Waziristan contrary to the "widespread perception in Pakistan that civilians... are the principal victims." The AP studied 10 drone strikes. Their reporters who spoke to about 80 villagers in North Waziristan were told that at least 194 people died in the ten attacks. According to the villagers 56 of those were either civilians or tribal police and 138 were militants, with 38 of the civilians dying in a single miscalculated attack which took place **on 17 March 2011**.

[Villagers stated that one way to tell if civilians were killed was to observe how many funerals took place after a strike; the bodies of militants were usually taken elsewhere for burial, while civilians were usually buried immediately and locally.]

According to the report, compiled in 2012, of the **Columbia Human Rights Clinic**, despite their strong efforts, two of the tracking organizations, **the Long War Journal** and **New America Foundation**, significantly and consistently under-estimated the potential number of civilians killed in Pakistan during the year 2011.

According to the London based **Bureau of Investigative Journalism**, at least 300 civilians had been killed by drones since 2008. Distinguishing civilians from those engaged in

hostilities was also found difficult. Invariably after each drone strike Pakistan lodged forth-right public complaints with the US, despite substantial evidence that the country had secretly co-operated with the CIA through intelligence sharing.

Referring to a **Columbia Law School's** later report "*Counting Drone Strikes Deaths*" **dated 30th September 2012** analysed by Alice K Ross [published in the US media on **5th October 2012**] of **Bureau of investigative Journalism**:

'President Obama's personal involvement in selecting the targets of covert drone strikes means he risks handing a "loaded gun". If Obama leaves, he's leaving a loaded gun: he's set up a programme where the greatest constraint is his personal prerogative. There's no legal oversight, no courtroom that can make [the drone programme] stop.'

President **Obama 'personally approved every military target' in Yemen and Somalia** and around a third of targets in Pakistan but nothing given in writing, the report said. The remainder of strikes in Pakistan were decided by the CIA; no one was there to justify the drone campaigns and their targets under international law. However, the fact remains that the CIA has no institutional history of complying with international law or setting up procedures for civilian deaths. The report observed:

'It was a covert spy agency; it wasn't set up for this. We don't know how prepared they are to monitor civilian deaths or how concerned they are.'

To this day, the CIA has never officially acknowledged its campaign though it was supposed to be accountable to Congress. The report also called for a task force to examine what measures were in place to protect civilians. The main cause of concern for law-abiding Americans was that the drone strikes had prompted retaliatory attacks from militants on those they believe were US spies, and stirred anti-US sentiment and violence among civilians in Yemen and Pakistan.

The said report compared the **Bureau of Investigative Journalism's** estimates of drone deaths in Pakistan to similar projects by the **Long War Journal, the New America Foundation and the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies**, noting that:

*"They consistently point to significantly higher civilian casualties than those suggested by the US government's statements. The problem remained that **the very terms 'civilian' and 'militant' are ambiguous, controversial, and susceptible to manipulation.**"*

The truth was revealed by the **'New York Times'** dated **29th May 2012** that all ***'military-aged males are held to be militants'***.

White House always placed its focus on the extent to which drones could protect American lives while the impact on Pakistani lives went ignored. So much trust was placed in technology that policymakers mostly failed to consider whether drone attacks were wreaking havoc on human beings of the same kind but living on the other part of the globe.

Columbia Law School's Human Rights Clinic found the **Long War Journal** and **New America Foundation** both **'significantly undercount'** civilian deaths caused by the drone attacks in Pakistan and elsewhere. Those under-estimates provided false justification to policymakers who wanted to expand un-manned drone strikes to new locations or against new groups. Exclusive or heavy reliance on the casualty counts of those two organisations was not appropriate because of the significant methodological errors.

Each drone strike reported in 2011 was examined and compared the datasets of each organisation with the available media reports. The ***HR Clinic*** found that between 72 and 155 civilians were credibly killed by drone strikes in 2011. ***The New America Foundation***, which is widely cited by many US media organisations, reported only that between three and nine civilians had been killed; ***the Long War Journal*** counted 30 civilians lost their lives. By contrast the Bureau's minimum estimate of 68 civilian deaths was significantly closer.

What result; that the counts provided by the **Bureau of Investigative Journalism** and similar organisations were ***'estimates only, not actual body counts'***. Citing a cogent illustration for the drone event of 30th October 2011 [cited elsewhere in these pages] in which the missiles hit a vehicle and a house in Dattakhel, North Waziristan. There came up THREE stories for the same one attack; one that the dead were all militants, second version insisted they were civilians - that four of them were chromites miners while the third contention was of a mixture of two aforesaid versions.

In March 2012 ***the New York Times*** published an investigation claiming the second story as correct - they were chromite miners.

Chris Woods, who was leading the Bureau's drones investigation team, welcomed the Columbia Law School's findings; US monitoring groups had been significantly under reporting credible counts of civilian deaths in Pakistan.

The US government had launched those attacks on targets in Pak-Afghan border areas of Pakistan using drones [unmanned aerial vehicles] controlled by the American CIA's Special Activities Division [SAD]. The strikes were initially ordered by President George Bush and had increased substantially under President Obama. Various surveys had shown that the strikes were deeply unpopular in Pakistan and had contributed to a negative perception of the US; the figures for US liking dropped from 58% in 2001 to 87 % in 2013.

DRONES DECLARED ILLEGAL:

In May 2013; the **Peshawar High Court** ruled that *'the attacks are illegal, inhumane, violate the UN charter on human rights and constitute a war crime'*. However, the Obama administration disagreed, stating that *'the attacks do not violate international law, and that the method of attack is precise and effective'*.

Pakistan's PPP government publicly condemned the drone attacks. However, it had allowed the drones to operate from Shamsi Airfield in Pakistan until **21st April 2011**. According to secret diplomatic cables leaked by ***Wikileaks, Pakistan's Army Chief Gen Kayani not only tacitly agreed to the drone flights, but in 2008 requested the Americans to increase them.***

An **International Crisis Group** report concluded that drone strikes were an "ineffective" way of combating militants in Pakistan. Towards ending 2013, the Pakistani Taliban [TTP] withdrew an offer of peace talks after a drone strike killed their deputy leader. The Pakistani Taliban's threats were already on record to "teach a lesson" to the US and Pakistan. Earlier, the TTP had killed 10 foreign mountain climbers near K2 peak. In another mis-targeted bomb killed fourteen civilians, including four children instead of security forces in Peshawar at the end of June 2013.

In early June, the ***CIA itself admitted*** that they did not even know who it was killing in some drone strikes. Few days later, PM Nawaz Sharif, again called for an end to drone strikes in Pakistan. Even that call was not given weight and a US strike killed another nine

people, an act that prompted Sharif to summon the US Ambassador in protest and to demand, an **'immediate halt'** to the drone attacks.

When in July 2013—a drone strike killed another 17 people in Waziristan, the findings of US **Center for Naval Analyses**, based on classified US military documents, declared that: **'American drones strikes were 10 times more likely to cause innocent casualties than bombs or missiles launched from planes.'**

In July 2013, the US had drastically scaled back drone attacks because the Pakistani military had started planning to end American **"airspace violations"**. The CIA was instructed to be more "cautious" and limit the drone strikes to high-value targets. In an interview in October 2013, one former drone operator said that children killed during strikes were reported as slain dogs.

The military record told that drone strikes were halted after 26th November 2011 since NATO forces killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in the Salala incident. Shamsi Airfield was got evacuated of Americans in December 2011. The incident had prompted a stop to the drone strikes for about two months **but again resumed on 10th January 2012.**

In March 2013, Ben Emmerson, the UN Special Reporter led a UN team that looked into civilian casualties from the US drone attacks, and stated that the attacks were violation of the sovereignty of Pakistan. He confirmed that Pakistan did not agree to the drone attacks, which was contradicted by US officials without citing any reason.

The **Bureau of Investigative Journalism** [BIJ]'s estimated cumulative statistics about US drone strikes till July 2013 told that of all the drone attack victims since 2004, more than 76% of the dead fall in the legal grey zone, 22% were confirmed civilians (included 5% minors) and only the remaining **1.5% were high-profile targets**. By numbers the statistics was:

- Total reported killed: 2,548 - 3,549
- Civilians reported killed: 411 - 890
- Children reported killed: 168 - 197
- Total reported injured: 1,177 - 1,480
- Total strikes: 370
 - Strikes under the Bush Administration: 52
 - Strikes under the Obama Administration: 318

Amnesty International published ***Will I Be Next? US Drone Strikes in Pakistan***, a 75-page examination of drone strikes [*Amnesty also termed it 'not comprehensive'*]. It was a field research into nine of 45 reported strikes that occurred between January 2012 and August 2013 in the Northern Waziristan region of Pakistan. Among the stories it told:

'On 6th July 2012, 18 male labourers, including one boy, were killed in a series of US drone strikes in the remote village of Zowi Sidgi. Missiles first struck a tent in which some men had gathered for an evening meal and then struck those who came to help the injured from the first strike.'

'On 24th October 2012, 68-year-old Mamana Bibi, mother of four local high school teachers - eldest named Rafiqur Rehman, was killed in a targeted drone strike; she was gathering vegetables in the family fields in Ghundi Kala village [of North Waziristan]. Her five grandchildren were also wounded.'

The Pakistan government publicly opposed drone attacks as too many civilians were killed in addition to their intended target - Islamist militants. The precise extent of human loss on the ground always remained unclear because the media people had only limited access to

the affected regions. In North Waziristan, allegedly many *jihadi* fighters were eliminated, but neither the Pakistani government nor the US authorities ever released full details. The London - based Amnesty researchers mentioned in their report that:

"People who are clearly no imminent threat to the US are being killed. The US has to come clean publicly with the justifications for these killings."

Much earlier, the Western powers had reached the conclusion that:

'Pakistani Taliban [TTP] effectively control North Waziristan, and offer safe havens to al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban who are fighting NATO troops across the border while logistic support of some locals are also available abundantly'.

The US maintained that they never infringed on Pakistan's territorial sovereignty as Pakistan had surrendered the area to militants long ago where most drone strikes occur.

As per available record with **Bureau of Investigative Journalism**, the US carried out 376 drone strikes in Pakistan since 2004, with the death toll given in an earlier paragraph. As per local media reports, about 926 of the dead were civilians whereas the Pakistani government officials frequently quoted that **'militant groups have killed about 42,000 Pakistanis, adding about 5200 security personnel since 2001'**.

WHITE HOUSE JUSTIFICATION:

US President Barack Obama said the strikes targeted **'people who are on a list of active terrorists'** but the US did not routinely speak publicly about drone operations, which had killed hundreds in those years of WOT. **Mr Obama made his comments during an hour-long video "hangout" on Google's social network.**

More than 130,000 questions were submitted before the hangout began, and six people were invited to join the president online for the event. They were able to ask questions and seek follow-up answers from Mr Obama – was a good gesture in fact. Replying a question, Obama said that:

"For us to be able to get them [Al Qaeda warriors] in another way would involve probably a lot more intrusive military action than the ones we're already engaging in. Drones have not caused a huge number of civilian casualties - important for everybody to understand that this thing is kept on a very tight leash".

An Amnesty International statement demanded:

".....a detailed explanation of how these strikes are lawful and what is being done to monitor civilian casualties and ensure proper accountability. What are the rules of engagement? While the president's confirmation of the use of drones in Pakistan is a welcome first step towards transparency, these and other questions need to be answered."

In one incident in March 2011 at least 40 people were killed in North Waziristan - all were civilians attending a tribal meeting – in fact it was a *jirga* of nationalist tribal leaders to gain a consensus that how the **'foreigner Taliban'** be pushed out from their areas. The drone took it as Taliban's gathering and killed most of them – the rest went seriously injured.

Drone attacks fuelled anti-American feeling in Pakistan. Country's foreign ministry responded to Mr Obama's remarks by saying: *"Our position on drone strikes is clear and based on principles. Drone attacks are unlawful, counterproductive and hence unacceptable. We cannot condone violation of our sovereignty."* But **the BBC**, referred to its release dated **31st January 2012**, held that despite Pakistan's public condemnation of drone strikes, however, the country's civilian and military leaders privately supported them till mid 2011 at least.

Referring to the **BBC dated 6th June 2012**: The US increased the intensity of launching drone attacks; eight attacks during the previous two weeks. Before that increase in strikes, there had only been 11 such attacks in the preceding six months.

The BBC held that there was a sense in Islamabad that this increase in frequency of attacks was a means of putting pressure on - even punishing - the country at a time when it had refused to re-open supply routes to NATO troops in Afghanistan unless certain demands were met. Though Pakistani PM Gilani had already bowed his head before the British PM Mr Cameron during his visit to London during early May 2012 assuring him, and through extension to the US, that NATO routes would be opened within the same month.

Abu Yahya al-Libi's death, along with his 14 companions, was confirmed during one of the attacks then - Washington felt justified, but it did not appease a large section of Pakistani society, for whom US drone attacks had become a source of considerable resentment.

The BBC's correspondent added the details of deaths of important militant leadership as: **June 2012** - Senior al Qaeda leader Abu Yahya al-Libi; **February 2012** - Al Qaeda commander Badar Mansoor; **August 2011** - Al Qaeda commander Atiyah Abd al-Rahman; **June 2011** - Senior al-Qaeda fighter Ilyas Kashmiri; **August 2009** - Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud.

49 year old Libyan Al-Libi was 2nd in command to Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was named al-Qaeda leader after Osama Bin Laden's death a year earlier. Libi, also known as Hasan Qayid, and Yunis al-Sahrawi, was member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group before he allied himself to Osama Bin Laden. He was considered by the organisation to be a daring and inspirational figure - a convincing speaker with strong religious credentials.

Libyan Al-Libi was captured by Pakistani forces in 2002 and sent to the US military airbase at Bagram in Afghanistan, from where he escaped [or made to escape] in July 2005 along with three other al Qaeda members. Reportedly, his American and Afghan guards were heavily paid from outside for his release.

STORY OF A DRONE OPERATOR:

[Brandon Bryant was a former sensor operator for the US Air Force Predator program who manned the camera on the unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly known as drones. After he left the active-duty Air Force in 2011, he was presented with a certificate that credited his squadron for 1,626 kills.]

Air Force pilot Brandon Bryant served as a sensor operator for the Predator program from 2007 to 2011, manning the camera on the unmanned aerial vehicles that carried out attacks overseas. In a documentary cum live interview titled as **A Drone Warrior's Torment: Ex-Air Force Pilot Brandon Bryant on His Trauma from Remote Killings**, he spoke his heart.

On 25th October 2013, live on air [or replayed] for 50.20 minutes at **American TV channel 'Democracy'**, Bryant explained how the United States used drones, and their

impact. He described the grisly scenes he watched unfold on his monitor as an Air Force drone operator in **an article in *GQ* magazine, "Confessions of a Drone Warrior"**.

About his first strike, Bryant told that it was roughly around **26th January 2007**, I got on shift [in Nevada] as a multi-aircraft control qualified sensor operator, which is where a pilot controls multiple drones, and then a sensor operator controls one drone.

From the darkness of a box in the Nevada desert, he watched as three men trudged down a dirt road in Afghanistan. On his console, the image showed the midwinter landscape of eastern Afghanistan's Kunar Province. He zoomed the camera in on the suspected insurgents, each dressed in traditional *shalwar kameez*; he knew nothing about them: not their names nor their thoughts.

He was told that they were carrying rifles on their shoulders, but they were shepherd's staffs. A directive from somewhere above, a mysterious chain of command that led straight to his headset, was clear: confirmed weapons. He switched from the visible spectrum; a safety observer loomed behind him to make sure the "weapon release". His targeting laser locked on the two men walking in front; a countdown started as three...two...one...then the flat delivery of the phrase "missile off the rail."

Seventy-five hundred miles away, a hellfire flared to life, detached from its mount, and reached supersonic speed in seconds. As he watched the men walk, they had fallen behind; then bright and silent as a camera flash, the screen lit up with white flame. When the smoke cleared there was blood around the three dead bodies.

That was Brandon Bryant's first shot; it was early 2007 - a few weeks after his 21st birthday.

As a sensor, Bryant's job was to work in tandem with the drone's pilot, who sat in the chair next to him. While the pilot controlled the drone's flight manoeuvres, Bryant acted as the Predator's eyes, focusing its array of cameras and aiming its targeting laser. When a Hellfire was launched, it was a joint operation: the pilot pulled a trigger, and Bryant was responsible for the missile's "terminal guidance".

In the words of President Obama *'with enormous potential growth and expenditures, drones will be a centre of our policy for the foreseeable future.'* By 2025, drones will be an \$82 billion business, employing an additional 100,000 workers. Most Americans—61% in the Pew survey of 2013—supported the idea of drones, a projection of American power that won't risk American lives.

Transparency has not been the defining feature of US drone policy over the last decade; a parallel and clandestine war was being waged in places like Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. Since 2004, the CIA carried out hundreds of strikes in Pakistani territory, cutting secret deals with Pakistani intelligence to operate a covert assassination program. Another covert CIA drone base was operated from Saudi Arabia to launch strikes in interior of Yemen.

By the spring of 2011, almost six years after he'd signed on, Senior Airman Brandon Bryant left the Air Force, turning down a \$109,000 bonus to keep flying. He was presented with a sort of scorecard covering his missions; total enemies killed were 1,626. However, one night, on his drive home, he started sobbing; pulled over and called his mother and told her ***'I killed someone, I killed people, and I don't feel good about it'***.

Other members of his squadron had different reactions to their work. One sensor operator, whenever he made a kill, went home and chugged an entire bottle of whiskey. A female operator, after her first shot, refused to fire again even under the threat of court martial. Another pilot had nightmares after watching two headless bodies float down the Tigris.

Bryant himself would have bizarre dreams where the characters from his favourite game, 'World of War craft', appeared in infrared. By mid-2011, Bryant was back home feeling angry, isolated, depressed; finally went to see a therapist. After a few sessions, he just broke down:

"I told her I wanted to be a hero, but I don't feel like a hero - just wasted the last six years of my life."

She diagnosed him with post-traumatic stress disorder. A year after, he was walking with a cane, had headaches and memory lapses, and fell into a black depression.

On his facebook page, Bryant wrote:

'.....I'm ashamed to have called any of you brothers in arms..... Combat is combat. Killing is killing. This isn't a video game. How many of you have killed a group of people, watched as their bodies are picked up, watched the funeral, then killed them too?

Yeah, it's not the same as being on the ground. So what? Until you know what it is like and can make an intelligent meaningful assessment, shut your goddamn mouths before somebody shuts them for you.'