

SPEAKER'S BRIEFING: PSYCHOLOGICAL TERROR? LESSONS FROM PAKISTAN AND YEMEN

Lessons from Yemen, Peter Schaapveld, Clinical & Forensic Psychologist

Dr Peter Schaapveld was invited by the UK-based charity, Reprieve, to accompany the organisation on a fact-finding mission to Yemen from 9-16 February 2013. During the trip, a number of interviews were conducted with civil society, journalists and government about on-going drone and other kinetic activity in country. In addition to the interviews, a three-day clinic was arranged in Aden from 13-15 February, during which victims of air strikes in Yemen were interviewed. This presentation will review these clinical findings.

In total ~~thirty-four~~ persons were interviewed during the three day clinic with the assistance of a translator. Twenty-five were male; one was female and eight were children. All have been subject to the on-going situation in Yemen. For nearly all of the subjects the triggering incident for the resulting abnormal mental health condition was an air strike. All continue to be affected by and prevented from recovery by the presence of drones. Throughout the week, people reported different levels of drone activity, often dependent upon where they were based in the country. Reports varied from the near constant presence of drones to drones flying on a circuit that passed overhead anywhere from once every seven minutes to once every forty-five minutes.

In terms of results virtually all interviewed were found to be suffering from formal abnormal psychological conditions. The majority (71%) were found to be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Other severe abnormal psychological conditions were found including Anxiety, Depression, dissociative experiences, panic reactions, hysterical-somatic reactions, exaggerated fear responses and abnormal grief reactions.

Of particular concern was the effect on the children; both observed and reported. The particular nature of the psychological effects on the children will be presented. Additional idiosyncratic findings from the sample will be noted. Future recommendations both for further systematic assessment and essential treatment will also be mentioned.

Dr Peter Schaapveld is a Clinical Psychologist and Forensic Psychologist registered with the British Psychological Society and the United Kingdom Health Professionals Council. He has academic qualifications in Clinical Psychology and Law and has practiced as a Clinical Psychologist for twenty four years (twenty years in the NHS). His professional practice has taken place in all mental health settings; (i.e. mental health hospitals, primary care, prisons, and community) and he has extensive experience of Psychological assessment and Psychological treatment for a variety of acute and enduring mental health problems. He is former visiting lecturer in psycho-legal issues for the professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Royal Holloway College, University of London and provides regular seminars and training events for mental health professionals psycho-legal issues.

Lessons from Pakistan, Jennifer Gibson, *Living Under Drones* by Stanford Law School and NYU University

In September 2012, Stanford and NYU Universities published a report detailing the impact of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan. The report was the product of nine months of intensive research and is the most comprehensive report to date on what it means to be Living Under Drones. Below is an abridged Executive Summary of that report, detailing the research team's findings.

Executive Summary

In the United States, the dominant narrative about the use of drones in Pakistan is of a surgically precise and effective tool that makes the US safer by enabling “targeted killing” of terrorists, with minimal downsides or collateral impacts.¹ This narrative is false.

Following nine months of intensive research—including two investigations in Pakistan, more than 130 interviews with victims, witnesses, and experts, and review of thousands of pages of documentation and media reporting—this report presents evidence of the damaging and counterproductive effects of current US drone strike policies. Based on extensive interviews with Pakistanis living in the regions directly affected, as well as humanitarian and medical workers, this report provides new and firsthand testimony about the negative impacts US policies are having on the civilians living under drones.

Real threats to US security and to Pakistani civilians exist in the Pakistani border areas now targeted by drones. It is crucial that the US be able to protect itself from terrorist threats, and that the great harm caused by terrorists to Pakistani civilians be addressed. However, in light of significant evidence of harmful impacts to Pakistani civilians and to US interests, current policies to address terrorism through targeted killings and drone strikes must be carefully re-evaluated. It is essential that public debate about US policies take the negative effects of current policies into account.

First, while civilian casualties are rarely acknowledged by the US government, there is significant evidence that US drone strikes have injured and killed civilians. In public statements, the US states that there have been “no” or “single digit” civilian casualties.”² It is difficult to obtain data on strike casualties because of US efforts to shield the drone program from democratic accountability, compounded by the obstacles to independent investigation of strikes in North Waziristan. The best currently available public aggregate data on drone strikes are provided by *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ)*, an independent journalist organization. *TBIJ* reports that from June 2004 through mid-September 2012, available data indicate that drone strikes killed 2,562-3,325 people in Pakistan, of whom 474-881 were civilians, including 176 children.³ *TBIJ* reports that these strikes also injured an additional 1,228-1,362 individuals. Where media accounts do report civilian casualties, rarely is any information provided about the victims or the communities they leave behind. This report includes the harrowing narratives of many survivors, witnesses, and family members who provided evidence of civilian injuries and deaths in drone strikes to our research team. It also presents detailed accounts of three separate strikes, for which there is evidence of civilian deaths and injuries, including a March 2011 strike on a meeting of tribal elders that killed some 40 individuals.

Second, US drone strike policies cause considerable and under-accounted-for harm to the daily lives of ordinary civilians, beyond death and physical injury. Drones hover twenty-four

¹ The US publicly describes its drone program in terms of its unprecedented ability to “distinguish ... effectively between an al Qaeda terrorist and innocent civilians,” and touts its missile-armed drones as capable of conducting strikes with “astonishing” and “surgical” precision. See, e.g., John O. Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, The Efficacy and Ethics of U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy, Remarks at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Apr. 30, 2012), [available at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/the-efficacy-and-ethics-us-counterterrorism-strategy](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/the-efficacy-and-ethics-us-counterterrorism-strategy).

² See *Obama Administration Counterterrorism Strategy* (C-Span television broadcast June 29, 2011), <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/AdministrationCo>; see also Strategic Considerations, *infra* Chapter 5: Strategic Considerations; Contradictions Chart, *infra* Appendix C.

³ *Covert War on Terror*, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/> (last visited Sept. 12, 2012).

hours a day over communities in northwest Pakistan, striking homes, vehicles, and public spaces without warning. Their presence terrorizes men, women, and children, giving rise to anxiety and psychological trauma among civilian communities. Those living under drones have to face the constant worry that a deadly strike may be fired at any moment, and the knowledge that they are powerless to protect themselves. These fears have affected behavior. The US practice of striking one area multiple times, and evidence that it has killed rescuers, makes both community members and humanitarian workers afraid or unwilling to assist injured victims. Some community members shy away from gathering in groups, including important tribal dispute-resolution bodies, out of fear that they may attract the attention of drone operators. Some parents choose to keep their children home, and children injured or traumatized by strikes have dropped out of school. Waziris told our researchers that the strikes have undermined cultural and religious practices related to burial, and made family members afraid to attend funerals. In addition, families who lost loved ones or their homes in drone strikes now struggle to support themselves.

Third, publicly available evidence that the strikes have made the US safer overall is ambiguous at best. The strikes have certainly killed alleged combatants and disrupted armed actor networks. However, serious concerns about the efficacy and counter-productive nature of drone strikes have been raised. The number of “high-level” targets killed as a percentage of total casualties is extremely low—estimated at just 2%.⁴ Furthermore, evidence suggests that US strikes have facilitated recruitment to violent non-state armed groups, and motivated further violent attacks. As the *New York Times* has reported, “drones have replaced Guantánamo as the recruiting tool of choice for militants.”⁵ Drone strikes have also soured many Pakistanis on cooperation with the US and undermined US-Pakistani relations. One major study shows that 74% of Pakistanis now consider the US an enemy.⁶

Fourth, current US targeted killings and drone strike practices undermine respect for the rule of law and international legal protections and may set dangerous precedents. This report casts doubt on the legality of strikes on individuals or groups not linked to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and who do not pose imminent threats to the US. The US government’s failure to ensure basic transparency and accountability in its targeted killing policies, to provide necessary details about its targeted killing program, or adequately to set out the legal factors involved in decisions to strike hinders necessary democratic debate about a key aspect of US foreign and national security policy. US practices may also facilitate recourse to lethal force around the globe by establishing dangerous precedents for other governments. As drone manufacturers and officials successfully reduce export control barriers, and as more countries develop lethal drone technologies, these risks increase.

In light of these concerns, this report recommends that the US conduct a fundamental re-evaluation of current targeted killing practices, taking into account all available evidence, the concerns of various stakeholders, and the short and long-term costs and benefits. A significant rethinking of current US targeted killing and drone strike policies is long overdue. US policy-makers, and the American public, cannot continue to ignore evidence of the civilian harm and counter-productive impacts of US targeted killings and drone strikes in

⁴ Peter Bergen & Megan Braun, *Drone is Obama’s Weapon of Choice*, CNN (Sept. 6, 2012), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/05/opinion/bergen-obama-drone/index.html>.

⁵ Jo Becker & Scott Shane, *Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will*, N.Y. Times (May 29, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/world/obamas-leadership-in-war-on-al-qaeda.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁶ Pew Research Center, *Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of U.S.: 74% Call America an Enemy* (2012), available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/06/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-Pakistan-Report-FINAL-Wednesday-June-27-2012.pdf>.

Pakistan. This report also supports and reiterates the calls consistently made by rights groups and others for legality, accountability, and transparency in US drone strike policies.

Jennifer Gibson is a co-author of *Living Under Drones*; written while she was a member of Stanford's International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic. In addition to her work with the clinic, Jennifer has extensive experience in children's rights, rule of law and development in sub-Saharan Africa. She has worked for a number of nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, including Save the Children UK, where she led the design of a multi-million dollar evaluation of social transfer systems on children in Africa. She has worked on human rights litigation in both domestic and international courts, including at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, where she worked on the trial of Former Liberian President Charles Taylor. Jennifer holds a Juris Doctor from Stanford Law School, a MPhil in International Relations from the University of Cambridge, where she held the prestigious Gates Cambridge Scholarship, and a BA from Alma College. She is currently a staff attorney at Reprieve, a London-based legal charity.