

US Officials Attack 'Far From Authoritative' Leaked Drone Report

By [Chris Woods](#)

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A Pakistani soldier in FATA, where there have been 370 CIA drone strikes. (Photo: Chris Woods)

US officials are claiming that an internal Pakistani assessment of civilian deaths from US drone strikes – [obtained and published in full by the Bureau](#) – is 'far from authoritative.'

The secret document was obtained by the Bureau from three independent sources. It provides details of more than 70 CIA drone strikes between 2006 and 2009, and was compiled by civilian officials throughout Pakistan's tribal areas.

They [noted](#) that at least 147 of 746 people listed as killed in CIA drone strikes between 2006 and 2009 were said to be civilians. That number could be as high as 220 civilian dead, the leaked report indicates.

Related article: [Exclusive - Leaked Pakistani report confirms high civilian death toll in CIA drone](#)

Now unnamed US officials are questioning the contents of the leaked report. A written statement has been provided to news organisations including the Bureau.

The statement notes that the leaked document was based on 'indirect input from a loose network of Pakistani government and tribal contacts'. As such, an official indicated, 'the result is a report whose findings are far from authoritative'.

The same statement added: 'The notion that the United States has undertaken operations in Pakistan that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of innocent Pakistanis is ludicrous. There is no credible information whatsoever to substantiate the report's distorted figures.'

Voice of America [also reported receiving a written statement](#) from US officials. Its version cited one as saying that the leaked document is not credible since it relies 'in part on erroneous media reporting'.

Pakistan estimates

There seems little gap between Pakistan's official position on civilian casualties, and the contents of the leaked report obtained by the Bureau.

Earlier this year Ben Emmerson QC, the UN's special rapporteur on counter-terrorism, was

officially informed by Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs that CIA drones had so far killed at least 2,200 people in the country, including at least 400 civilians.

The figures were [disclosed to Emmerson](#) as he made a three-day visit to the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which compiled the figures, said a further 200 of the total dead were also likely to be civilians.

And reporting on leaked US intelligence documents obtained by [news agency McClatchy](#) suggests that US records privately indicate civilian deaths where publicly the administration denies them.

Those documents, which have not yet been published, are said to cover two periods: 2006 to 2008, and January 2010 to September 2011, and indicate that what US officials say publicly about drone strikes does not always match intelligence reports.

Pakistan's government has so far refused to confirm the authenticity of the latest leaked document obtained by the Bureau - though it is not contesting the report's claims of high civilian deaths.

'I am not in a position to authenticate the veracity of this report, but the facts that are being revealed are something which is not new,' Foreign Ministry spokesman Aizaz Ahmed Choudhry told Voice of America. 'We have always said that drone strikes cause civilian casualties.'

Lawyer Shahzad Akbar of legal charity Reprieve has brought a number of legal cases in Pakistan and Europe trying to force greater clarity on the issue of civilian deaths. He told the Bureau he found it troubling that the US appears to be claiming that only it can accurately assess civilian deaths in Pakistan.

'How is it possible for the US to determine who has been killed, when they often do not know to start with who they are targeting?' Akbar emailed from Islamabad.

'Drone surveillance alone cannot determine who is militant and who is not.'

Related article: [Get the Data - The Pakistan government's secret document](#)

'Poor US intelligence'

In a fresh development, a retired military figure once responsible for security in Waziristan now says that historically, poor US practice may have contributed to higher non-combatant casualties.

[Brigadier Mahmood Shah](#) claimed to [Voice of America](#) that CIA drone strikes in the early days of the campaign were based on poor US ground intelligence:

'They [the US] gave us 28 places that here are militants, then we had full recce [reconnaissance] of the area and we visited the places and we found that 27 out of 28 were incorrect, and one was correct,' Shah told VoA.

'So this was the amount of accuracy and if they had the permission to shoot at that time, which we never thought would be possible, you can imagine how many people, civilian people that would have killed.'

The Bureau presently estimates that 410-928 civilians are among 2,509-3,576 people killed in CIA drone strikes in Pakistan since 2004. This is based on a two-year analysis of news reports, court documents, field investigations, leaked intelligence papers and other credible sources.

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