



By Rubia

An exhibition recently opened in London showing the impact that drone attacks are having on Pakistan. Noor Behram is a journalist from Waziristan who has been documenting the aftermath of drone attacks for the past three years. Behram set about collecting images of children and women injured or killed by drone strikes.

The images, sometimes difficult to watch, show the reality of what has become commonly called 'collateral damage'. They include a severed hand and a child with the top of his head missing. Other images show children playing with debris, human remains buried under rubble and an attack on a funeral procession. Slippers and bits of clothing are all that remain to show that life once existed and the vast images of debris and destruction show the remoteness of the area, highlighting the considerable risks that he must have taken to cover the attacks.

The effects of drone strikes on civilian populations inside Pakistan have been surrounded by continuous controversy. The sovereignty of a state undermined by the actions of a close ally, whose decision to wage an attack is made from a control room thousands of miles away.

In the UK much of the media reports centre on the number of militants killed in these attacks with very little reports verifying the number of civilian casualties. Washington has repeatedly stated that very few civilians are killed. But the use of drones has been sharply criticised by Pakistani officials as well as UN Special Rapporteur Phillip Alston who stated the use of drones were a growing challenge to the international rule of law. He has said "...because this programme remains shrouded in official secrecy, the international community does not know where and when the CIA is authorised to kill, the criteria for individuals who may be killed, how it ensures killings are legal, and what follow up there is when civilians are legally killed."

According to the US think tank The New American Foundation which records drone strikes, the number of non-militant fatalities based on drone strikes since 2004 stands at 20%. In 2010 it was close to 5%. Some figures suggest up to 2,490 people have been killed by US unmanned drones in Pakistan since 2004.

This week former US intelligence Chief Dennis Blair said the drone campaign is back-firing and damaging US/ Pak relations, and that Pakistan should be given more say in how strikes are carried out.

Clive Stafford Smith the director of the legal aid charity Reprieve has taken up the campaign on the use of drones and is working closely with Mirza Shahzad Akbar a Pakistani human rights lawyer. Akbar has been documenting evidence on drone strikes and helped to secure Behram's images.

In 2010 Akbar was approached by a journalist Karim Khan after his 18 year old son and 35 year old brother were both killed in a drone strike. Since filing this case other families have come forward. Reprieve's campaign is calling for the arrest of the CIA's former legal chief John Rizzo.

“Bugsplat” is the official term used by the US authorities when human beings are successfully killed with drone missiles.

Clive Stafford Smith believes the majority of drone strike casualties are civilians. He said, “our mission to Pakistan leads us to believe that American drones, guided by highly questionable US intelligence, indiscriminately kill innocent people, including children. Far from eliminating terrorism, we believe that when Americans play videogames with Pakistani lives this causes radicalisation, and increases the danger to all, whether Pakistani or American.”

Gaming in Waziristan is being shown at Beaconsfield, Newport St, SE11 until 5th August 2011.

<http://beaconsfield.ltd.uk/projects/gaming-in-waziristan/>

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