



Drones: No Safe Place for Children

Reprise

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Since 2004, the U.S. has launched 415 drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia—outside of declared warzones—killing more than 3,000 people. Beyond these direct casualties, **the U.S. drone program is terrorising entire civilian populations, nearly half of which are children.**

Drones hover over communities twenty-four hours a day, creating a constant, physical reminder for the people below that they could be killed at any moment. Nobody knows who is being targeted, so nobody knows how to make themselves safe. As a result, parents are afraid to send their children to school, teachers are afraid to teach, community members are afraid to gather for any function—whether it be for local governance or a funeral. Trips to the market are fraught with danger because you never know whether the drone’s next target is nearby. All of this, in turn, causes the local economy to grind to a halt. **For children living in these communities, there is no aspect of day-to-day life that is not impacted by the constant presence of the drones and the threat that they bring.**

The U.S. not only targets individuals who are specifically identified on a “kill list”; they also target individuals who unwittingly engage in behaviour which the U.S. deems to be suspicious. As a result, **Children may be killed simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the so-called ‘wrong place’ may be their bedroom or classroom.**

The U.S.’ drone program represents a dangerous violation of children’s rights as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, through its drone program, the U.S. is also committing three of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict.

I. The U.S.’ Drone Program and the Six Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict

The United Nations Security Council has identified six grave violations of children in armed conflict which serve as a basis to gather evidence on violations with the ultimate goal of protecting children during armed conflict and ending the impunity of perpetrators.

1. Killing and Maiming—No Safe Place for Children

Through Security Council resolution 1882 of 2009, the Council defined patterns of killing and maiming of children in contravention of international law as a trigger for the Secretary General’s annual list of shame.¹

The U.S.’ drone program in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen has created an identifiable pattern of killing children. U.S. drones often target homes and community gatherings where children would naturally be present. In reality, in the areas which the U.S. targets, there is no safe place—even home or school—for children to escape the possibility of being injured or killed in a strike.

¹ Website of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; accessed 25 January 2013:
<http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/the-most-grave-violations/killing-and-maiming/>

In these three countries, drone strikes have killed at minimum 204 children as documented by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) between 2004 and 23 January 2013.² There is evidence that the number of children killed could be considerably higher than the cases confirmed by TBIJ, but a lack of political will to document child deaths from drone strikes has left this data uncollected or unverified.



Faheem Qureshi, 14 year-old injured in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan on 23 January 2009

Similarly, quantitative data on the maiming of children have not been collected; however, available anecdotal data suggest that **U.S. drone strikes have led to a pattern of maiming of children in the communities where they have struck.** One example of this is Faheem Qureshi, a fourteen year-old Reprieve client who lost his left eye and suffered a skull fracture in a strike on his uncle's house in January 2009. Another Reprieve client, Sadaullah Khan, who has since died, lost both legs and an eye in a 2009 strike on his home when he was 15 years-old. Considering that houses and community gatherings are routinely targeted, there is no doubt that Faheem and Sadaullah were only two of many children who have suffered permanent disabilities as a result of the U.S.' 415 drone strikes.

2. Attacks on Schools

In 2011, direct physical attacks on schools were added as triggers for the Secretary-General's list of shame. TBIJ has identified **more than ten strikes on current or former schools.**³ In the most egregious instance, in 2006 U.S. drones struck a religious school in Pakistan on 30 October 2006, flattening the school and killing up to 69 children. The children ranged in ages from seven to 17.⁴

There is also evidence that beyond directly targeting schools, the U.S. has failed to ensure that it was adequately avoiding schools in its attacks. In a dual strike on 11 August 2011, a housing compound and a vehicle were hit nearby to a girls' school. One child was killed in this attack.⁵

3. Denial of Humanitarian Access—The U.S.' Use of 'Rescuer Strikes'⁶

The denial of humanitarian access is defined as "blocking the free passage or timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need as well as the deliberate attacks against humanitarian workers."

The U.S. method of using so-called 'double taps' (striking the same location more than once in succession) meets both parts of the definition of the denial of humanitarian access: **by directly targeting first responders attempting to rescue those injured in drone strikes, the U.S. has ensured that in subsequent strikes, humanitarian actors will delay assistance to avoid being hit in a double tap.**

² Website of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; accessed 25 January 2013: <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2013/01/03/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-2013/>

³ Website of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; accessed 25 January 2013: <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/11/more-than-160-children-killed-in-us-strikes/>

⁴ <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/obama-2011-strikes/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The U.S. military refers to these as 'double taps'

The effect this has had on potential first responders in the community is clear. One person interviewed by the research team which produced the “Living Under Drones” study⁷ described the aftermath of a strike: “Other people came to check what had happened; they were looking for the children in the beds and then a second drone strike hit those people.”⁸ The result is communities no longer rush to the aid of those injured. When they do, they know they may themselves become targets.

Reprieve client, Faheem Qureshi, a 14 year-old injured in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan on 23 January 2009 acknowledges that he could have died waiting for rescuers to save him after he was injured in a strike. In his words, “[u]sually, when a drone strikes and people die, nobody comes near the bodies for half an hour because they fear another missile will strike.”⁹ Faheem survived the strike only because he was able to drag his burning body from the rubble to an area far enough away that people felt it was safe to provide aid.

The U.S.’ policy of using double taps is so widespread that humanitarian organizations have had to develop policies to protect their workers. For instance, **one humanitarian organization prevents them from approaching a drone strike area until a full six hours after the strike.**¹⁰

It is important to contextualize the effects that the targeting of first rescuers and humanitarian personnel through double taps in the overall isolation of the areas where these attacks are occurring. In Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, these attacks occur in a context characterized by a dearth of basic health and other humanitarian resources. The FATA region of Pakistan, where the vast majority of strikes have occurred, is cut off from the rest of the country by a regime of checkpoints that make travelling difficult. Similarly, both Yemen and Somalia are among the poorest countries in the world with some of the least adequate infrastructure. The compounding affect of targeting first responders and humanitarian workers in areas which are deprived of basic health resources can have doubly injurious consequences for children.

⁷ In 2012, Stanford and New York Universities released *Living Under Drones*, one of the most comprehensive studies to date on the impact of drones on communities in Pakistan. The study was conducted over a nine month period. The team conducted 130 interviews with victims, communities, civil society, and government, as well as thousands of pages of document review.

⁸ “Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan.” International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012; p. 75

⁹ Ibid. p. 75

¹⁰ Ibid. p.76

II. Violations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

In addition to committing three of the six grave violations of children in armed conflict, the U.S.' drone program also violates a range of rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

1. The Right to Survival and Development: CRC Art. 6

The response of former White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, a senior adviser to President Obama's reelection campaign, when asked how Obama's administration justified the killing by drone strike of a 16 year-old U.S. citizen, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki (pictured right) in Yemen:

"I would suggest that you should have a far more responsible father if they are truly concerned about the well being of their children."¹¹

[Click here to watch an interview with Abdulrahman's Grandfather](#)



Children's supposedly inherent right to life is manifestly not a concern in the U.S.' drone program.¹² Not only are children being killed for the alleged crimes of their family members,¹³ but to use the military slang of drone pilots, **hundreds of children have become "bug splats"—killed by drones whether specifically targeted or not.**

Eight year-old Nabila was caring for her cow, when a missile struck a few feet away from her on 24 October 2012. Nabila, and her grandmother, who was nearby picking vegetables, immediately ran for their house. Before they could make it, though, a second missile struck, killing her grandmother and imbedding shrapnel in Nabila's arm. When Kaleem, Nabila's older brother heard the blast, he ran out the house to try and help his grandmother. He soon realized that there was nothing he could do as his grandmother's body was in pieces. Approximately five minutes later, the drone returned and struck again, severely injuring, Kaleem, and knocking him unconscious.

When Nabila's father Rafik heard about the strike he rushed back from work only to find his older sons digging his mother's grave. Nabila and her younger siblings are now left without a caregiver, as Rafik has to work to bring bread to the family table. At only seven, Nabila witnessed the violent death of her grandmother, the closest she had to a mother figure. Today, her wounds are healing well; however, this Wednesday of 2012 marked a radical change to her young life. Having been confronted to such traumatic event, and forced to live in constant fear, it is fair to assume that Nabila's life will not be the same.

¹¹ Robert Gibbs, quoted in How Team Obama Justifies the Killing of a 16-Year-Old American; The Atlantic, 24 October 2012. Accessed 5 February 2013: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/10/how-team-obama-justifies-the-killing-of-a-16-year-old-american/264028/>

¹² UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 6

¹³ [ACLU to Obama: You Can't Just Vaporize Americans Without Judicial Process](#); Mother Jones, 18 July 2012. Accessed 5 February 2013: <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2012/07/aclu-sues-awlaki-khan-death>

As explained in the section in killing and maiming above, in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, **U.S. drone strikes have killed at minimum 204 children.**¹⁴ This number is continuing to grow: two children were reported killed in the most recent strike on Yemen in January 2013.¹⁵ The real number of child deaths is likely considerably higher, but a lack of political will to document child deaths from drone strikes has left this data uncollected or unverified.



Click to watch BBC's Report: 'Drone strike killed my grandmother outside our house'

Compounding the lack of political will to investigate child casualties is the fact that the U.S. keeps its drone program shrouded in complete secrecy. In March 2013, U.S. Senator Rand Paul spoke on the senate floor for 13 hours in an attempt to filibuster John Brennan's nomination for the CIA over the issue of the secrecy of the drones program. Senator Paul could not get an answer from the administration over whether the president could order a drone strike on U.S. soil. Given the lack of transparency the U.S. government is affording its own citizens, there is little hope that it will ever investigate the deaths of children and casualties of its drone program in marginalized communities of Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen.

Despite the U.S. government's secrecy, stories have started to emerge from drone-affected communities, and the process of documenting the myriad of child rights violations stemming from the program has begun.

U.S. drones often target homes and community gatherings where children would naturally be present. For instance, of six drone strikes which have already occurred in Pakistan in 2013, half targeted homes. Fourteen year-old victim, Faheem Qureshi (*pictured above*), offers a vivid description of the moment when drone missiles struck his uncle's home, where he was visiting, to the 'Living Under Drones' research team:

On the night of January 23, 2009, in the village of Zeraki in North Waziristan, relatives and neighbors gathered for tea and conversation in the hujra [reception area of a Waziri home]...Also in the hujra were Khalil's nephews, twenty-one-year-old Azaz-el-Rehman Qureshi and [four]teen-year-old Faheem Qureshi. His female family members were present, as were children, but they were in a nearby space...At about 5:00 that evening, they heard the hissing sound of a missile and instinctively bent their heads down. The missile slammed into the center of the room, blowing off the ceiling and roof, and shattering all the windows. The immense pressure from the impact cracked the walls of the attached house, as well as those of neighboring houses....Faheem, who stated that he was approximately ten footsteps away from the center of the hujra, suffered a fractured skull and received

¹⁴ Website of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; accessed 25 January 2013: <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2013/01/03/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-2013/>
¹⁵ "Airstrikes targeting militants kill 9 people in Yemen" *The Global Times*. 24 January 2013.

*shrapnel wounds and burns all over the left side of his body and face. All others in the hujra—at least seven, but as many as 15 people—were killed.*¹⁶

In reality, in the areas which the U.S. targets, there is no safe place—even their bedrooms or classrooms—for children to escape the possibility of being injured or killed in a strike.

2. Children’s Right to an Adequate Standard of Living: CRC Art. 27

The harm which the U.S.’ drone program has on children’s lives does not end at the threat of death or injury. There are a host of knock-on effects with dire consequences, including the violation of children’s right to an adequate standard of living. The economic hardship drones cause is severe. **Strikes destroy homes, cause the loss of families’ wage earners, and lead to unaffordable medical costs.** In poor countries lacking any sort of social safety nets, the financial shock of the loss of a life or home can throw a family into a cycle of debt and poverty.

A large percentage of drone strikes have been on homes; for instance more than 25 strikes in Yemen have hit at least one home.¹⁷ In Pakistan, Yemen and in Somalia—and indeed much of the world—a family’s home is likely to be its primary asset. Thus, among the devastating consequences that the shelling of homes can have on families is the obliteration of whatever assets and economic security that a family might have had.

Furthermore, the particular housing customs in Pakistan extend the financial harm that families suffer from drone strikes. Extended families tend to live together in housing complexes containing several small individual homes. Researchers of the “Living Under Drones” report learned about how the effects of drone strikes are exacerbated in these circumstances.

*“Many interviewees told us that often strikes not only obliterate the target house, usually made of mud, but also cause significant damage to three or four surrounding houses. Such destruction exacts a significant cost on communities, especially in a place like FATA where ‘underdevelopment and poverty are particularly stark,’ and savings, insurance, and social safety nets’ are largely unavailable.”*¹⁸

Researchers from the “Living Under Drones” study identified a direct link between drone strikes and child labor in Pakistan. When a key earner is lost in a drone strike, “Families struggle to compensate for the lost income, often forcing children or other younger relatives to forgo school and enter the workforce at a young age.”¹⁹

“Nadia, 10 years-old was at school when her house was hit by a drone, killing her father and mother: ‘My relatives rushed to the spot and tried to recover the dead bodies trapped under the debris but we couldn’t identify them as they were completely burned.’ Nadia is

¹⁶ “Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan.” International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012; p. 70

¹⁷ Website of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism; accessed 25 January 2013: <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2013/01/03/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-2013/>

¹⁸ “Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan.” International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012; p.77

¹⁹ Ibid.

an only child and has moved in with her aunt in a nearby town. She says she has 'no source of income with my parents gone...my aunt looks after me now and I help her in the house...but I want admission into school. I want an education.'"²⁰

In all three countries, the threat of drone strikes has been linked to displacement. Unable to prevent—or even predict—when drones will strike, families in Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia have left their communities and livelihoods and become IDPs, often with dire economic consequences. For instance, in Yemen, Ahmad Khulani, head of the observation committee formed to help evacuating residents, said that many of the tens of thousands of people fleeing Abyan province are doing so because they fear drone strikes.²¹

"Who can we complain to for the death of a relative? We will not come back to this city." Salma Ja'afar, a housewife who left Abyan for Aden²²

3. Children's Right to Health: CRC Art. 24

Children's Physical Health:

Beyond the direct injuring and maiming of children, arguably the most egregious violation of children's right to health through the U.S.' drone program is the targeting and striking of health facilities, such as the attack on Al-Razi hospital in Abyan Yemen in September 2011.²³ Before the strike that destroyed it, this hospital, which featured a pediatric ward, was the only functioning hospital in the region. Currently, residents must seek medical aid from the post office, where provisional services have been set up.

The context in which the U.S. operates its drone program compounds violations of this vital right. One factor which unifies the plight of drone-affected communities in Somalia, North Waziristan and Yemen is the absolute inadequacy of their access to health facilities. For instance, North Waziristan suffers from a dearth of basic health facilities—from emergency medical centers to adequate hospitals. UNICEF reports that in the FATA region, where many drone strikes occur, 450 community health centers were closed by the government in 2010 due to the unwillingness of personnel to work in the region.²⁴ Drone strike victims must travel to Peshawar for medical treatment, where they only have recourse to private hospitals, receiving treatment costing many times the average annual income in their communities.²⁵ Similarly, in Yemen, where almost half of the population is food insecure, health services have broken down to such an extent that

²⁰ "Civilian Harm and Conflict in Northwest Pakistan." Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC); 2010, p. 62

²¹ Almasmari, Karim. "US makes a drone attack a day in Yemen." *The National*; 15 June 2011.

²² Almasmari, Karim. "US makes a drone attack a day in Yemen." *The National*; 15 June 2011.

²³ "Conflict in Yemen: Abyan's Darkest Hour." Amnesty International; July 2012.

²⁴ UNICEF Pakistan Annual Report p. xvii

²⁵ "Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan." International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012; p.79

much of the population risks epidemics.²⁶ According to UNOCHA in Yemen: “Following the breakdown in public services, more than five million people lack access to basic health care...”²⁷ Because of the lack of health infrastructure in drone-affected areas, victims must make long journeys to seek care from hospitals in Aden or Sana’a. Once there, it is likely that the hospitals will be unable to supply the specialized treatment victims need. The necessary tertiary care must be sought outside Yemen’s borders, at likely impossible expense. The situation is little different in Somalia, where the World Health Organization reports that, “health standards in Somalia are reported to be among the worst in Sub-Saharan Africa because of widespread poverty, frequent famines and civil strife...”²⁸

The drone program itself compromises children’s access to emergency services. As explained in the section on denial of humanitarian access above, the U.S. practice of using so-called ‘double taps’ (striking the same location more than once in quick succession) works to ensure that in subsequent strikes, humanitarian actors will delay assistance to avoid being hit in a double tap. **First responders and humanitarian agencies have learned from hard experience that they to ensure their own safety, they must delay their response—sometimes for hours.**

Therefore, **children who are directly injured in drone strikes or whose health is otherwise compromised through the drone program are children who have some of the worst access to health care in the world.** With injuries going untreated, the long-term effects on children are compounded and lead to permanent disability or worse.

Children’s Mental Health and Psychological Trauma:

While drone strikes physically injure some children, the constant, terrorizing presence of drones overhead traumatizes whole populations of children. Testimonies from community members as disparate as Pakistan and Yemen have led researchers to one conclusion: **the U.S. drone program is having a profound and possibly irreversible psychological effect on children.**

One of the most frequently cited psychological ailments is PTSD. Communities report high levels of PTSD among both adults and children. The PTSD has a dual root cause: the constant presence of the hovering drone serves as a continuous reminder to children of death, while the communities’ inability to predict when strikes will occur or who the drone will target raises means people are perpetually insecure. The result is that **entire communities, more than half of which are comprised of children, live with a constant, physical reminder that their death or that of their family members could come at any, arbitrary moment.**

Dr. Peter Schaapveld a clinical and forensic psychologist and an expert in psychological trauma conducted an assessment of the psychological impact of drone strikes on communities in Adan, Yemen in February 2013. He described what he found as a ‘psychological emergency’ and said that of the 28 victims interviewed, approximately

²⁶<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Key%20Messages%20on%20Main%20Needs.pdf>

²⁷http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen_2012_MYR.pdf

²⁸ World Health Organisation “Eastern Mediterranean Regional Health System Observatory.” Accessed 11 March 2013:

<http://gis.emro.who.int/healthsystemobservatory/main/Forms/CountryInfo.aspx?Country=SO MALIA>

99% had some type of traumatic disorder. 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. He stated that the constant presence of drones means that residents are consistently re-traumatized and recovery is virtually impossible:

*"What I saw in Yemen was deeply disturbing. Entire communities – including young children who are the next generation of Yemenis - are being traumatized and re-traumatized by drones."*²⁹

He noted that the most disturbing finding was the dire impact on children, and that the overwhelming concern of community members was the impact on children.³⁰ Dr Schaapveld found that those examined were suffering from attachment disorders (either clinging to parents or behaving in an aloof, disconnected manner, essentially withdrawing). They also exhibited a severe fear of noise, a lack of concentration, a loss of interest in pleasurable activities and infrequent or nonexistent school attendance. He further described children as appearing as "hollowed-out shells of children" who looked "sullen" and had "lost their spark".³¹

Dr. Schaapveld describes the case of eight-year-old Yasmin,³² who witnessed a presumed drone strike on her next door neighbor's house. Before a strike hit the house next door she was a keen student and would often study for over an hour. After the strike she has been restless and unable to concentrate on studying for more than 5 to 10 minutes. She is also resistant to attending school. She is hyperactive and argumentative, has hallucinations and dreams of chaos and dead people. She frequently vomits at the sounds of drones and airplanes; indeed she vomited as she passed the airport on her journey to the clinic:

*"Her father said that she vomits every day, and also when she hears aircraft, or drones, or anything related. She said, in her own words, 'I am scared of those things because they throw missiles.'...She has been waking terrified from her sleep. She points to the ceiling and says 'people there want me to suffocate.' Her dreams are of dead people, planes and people running around scared."*³³

According to Dr. Schaapveld, persistent traumatic experiences were damaging the brains of child victims such as Yasmin and the two cases described here:

Jamil (not his real name) was seven years old and had experienced air strikes since 2012. He regularly woke up screaming, and was startled by loud noises. He was 'spaced out', characteristics of dissociative re-experience of the trauma. He was now doing poorly at school. Murad (not his real name), aged 17, often re-experienced the trauma of watching his friend burn to death after a drone strike. He told Dr. Schaapveld that he used to be interested in Western music and films but had now lost all interest. He appeared withdrawn.

²⁹ "Drones in Yemen causing a 'psychological emergency', psychologist tells MPs." Reprieve Press Release, 5 March 2013.

³⁰ "Drone attacks 'traumatising a generation of children'" Channel 4 News, 5 March 2013. Accessed 7 March 2013: <http://www.channel4.com/news/drone-attacks-traumatising-a-generation-of-children>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Not her real name

³³ "Drone attacks 'traumatising a generation of children'" Channel 4 News, 5 March 2013. Accessed 7 March 2013: <http://www.channel4.com/news/drone-attacks-traumatising-a-generation-of-children>

Researchers in drone-affected communities in Pakistan had similar findings. For instance, Michael Kugelman of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, reports: “I have heard Pakistanis speak about children in the tribal areas who become hysterical when they hear the characteristic buzz of a drone.”³⁴ Similarly, a person interviewed for the “Living Under Drones” report described how children are affected:

“When [children] hear the drones, they get really scared, and they can hear them all the time so they’re always fearful that the drone is going to attack them... [B]ecause of the noise, we’re psychologically disturbed—women, men, and children...Twenty-four hours, [a] person is in stress and there is pain in his head.”³⁵

Researchers for the report found that the consequences of drone use on communities and individuals included emotional breakdowns; running indoors or hiding when drones appear above; fainting; nightmares and flashbacks; hyper startled reactions to loud noises; outbursts of anger or irritability; loss of appetite; and insomnia. A mental health professional working with drone-affected communities in Pakistan explains his concerns:

“The biggest concern I have as a [mental health professional] is that when the children grow up, the kinds of images they will have with them, it is going to have a lot of consequences. You can imagine the impact it has on personality development. People who have experienced such things, they don’t trust people; they have anger...So when you have these young boys and girls growing up with these impressions, it causes permanent scarring and damage.”³⁶

Finally, it is important to note that the places where drone strikes occur in all three countries are places where it is least likely that children would have access to psychological care.

4. Children’s Right to Education: CRC Art. 28

Children in the three countries targeted through the U.S.’ drone program already face immense challenges in terms of their ability to access education. The affected regions are impoverished and lack educational infrastructure. In the FATA region of Pakistan, which the U.S. has targeted through its drone program, schools—particularly girls’ schools—have been targeted and attacked by armed non-state actors.

There is no question that drones make this worse. It



“I wanted to be a doctor, but I can’t walk to school anymore. When I see others going, I wish I could join them.” Saidullah Khan, who has since died, lost both legs and an eye in a 2009 strike on his home when he was 15 years-old ³⁷

³⁴ Kugelman, Michael. “In Pakistan, Death Is Only One of the Civilian Costs of Drone Strikes.” Huffington Post; 2 May 2012.

³⁵ Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan.” International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012 p.86

³⁶ Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan.” International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012 p.87

³⁷ Saadullah, drone victim who lost both legs and an eye quoted in ‘Pakistani civilian victims vent anger over US drones, Orla Guerin, BBC; 3 November 2011.

has been well-documented that **parents pull their children from school because they fear that the schools will be struck** or that children will be targeted in their journeys to and from school. As reported by the ‘Living under Drones’ research team:

“One father, after seeing the bodies of three dead children in the rubble of a strike, decided to pull his own children out of school. ‘I stopped [them] from getting an education,’ he admitted. ‘I told them we will be finished one day, the same as other people who were going [to school] and were killed in the drone attacks.’ He stated that this is not uncommon: ‘I know a lot of people, girls and boys, whose families have stopped them from getting [an] education because of drone attacks.’ Another father stated that when his children go to school ‘they fear that they will all be killed, because they are congregating.’ Ismail Hussain, noting similar trends among the young, said that ‘the children are crying and they don’t go to school. They fear that their schools will be targeted by the drones.’ Mohammad Kausar, a father of three, explained: ‘Strikes are always on our minds. That is why people don’t go out to schools, because they are afraid that they may be the next ones to be hit.’ A college student, whose brother was killed in a drone strike, told us that in some cases, staff and teachers also ‘don’t come because of these drone strikes. The principal and maybe a few nominal staff come just for presence, but, apart from that, nobody comes . . . other people are scared to come to our places to teach us.”³⁸

As stressed in the testimonies related above, parents and children fear school for two primary reasons: the U.S.’ use of ‘signature strikes’ makes people—including children—fear gathering in groups as they believe that this could lead the U.S. to classify them as militants; and parents and children fear school because schools have been directly targeted and struck. As outlined in the section above on attacks on schools, TBIJ has identified more than ten strikes on current or former schools, including one in which 69 children were killed.

“We managed to compile a list comprising the ages and addresses of those who fell prey so that we could tell the world that there was no terrorist in the madrassa and no militancy training was going on there.”³⁹

For children who do make it to school, the effects of drones impair their ability to learn. As Dr. Schaapveld found in his research of drone-affected communities in Yemen, effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on children include not wanting to go to school, and being unable to form relationships or play with other children. Similarly, in Pakistan, Faheem Qureshi, who was the sole survivor of an attack on a home which left him disabled now struggles with attention, cognitive, and emotional difficulties. In his words:

Our minds have been diverted from studying. We cannot learn things because we are always in fear of the drones hovering over us, and it really scares the small kids who go to school. . . . At the time the drone struck, I had to take exams, but I couldn’t take exams after that because it weakened my brain. I couldn’t learn things, and it affected me emotionally. My [mind] was so badly affected . . .⁴⁰

³⁸ Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan.” International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012 p.87

³⁹ Maulana Haroonur Rashid, member of the National Assembly, quoted in ‘Most Bajaur victims were under 20’, The News; 5 November 2006.

⁴⁰ Living Under Drones; Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan.” International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic Stanford Law School & Global Justice Clinic NYU School of Law. September 2012 p.87

Fourteen year-old Mohsin Haq similarly described the effect of drones on some of his classmates, who had dropped out, and discusses his hopes for the future:

*"[t]hey are mentally disturbed. They can't focus. They're just too worried about their family. They're not sure about anything, so school doesn't make sense to them." [The children in my community] are very optimistic that someday, when these things do stop, they will continue with their life as they were before, start going to school again. They still dream about a bright future, about the aspiring people they want to be, the future administrators, the future principals of the schools, and teachers and future politicians. . . . Every family, everybody, they do want to think about their bright futures, their prosperous jobs, and their young kids. But they can't think like that because of these drones, because of this uncertainty."*⁴¹

What you can do to help fight the U.S.' drone program and its violation of children's rights:

1. Get in touch with Reprieve to arrange an opportunity to discuss how you can use your expertise to address these issues: [Contact Us](#)
2. Follow [Reprieve's twitter feed](#) to receive regular updates on drones and anti-drone actions

⁴¹ Ibid p.87