

American Activists to Attempt Anti-Drone March Across Pakistan

Saturday 25 August 2012, by [HAYDEN Tom](#) (Date first published: 22 August 2012).

A sixty-kilometer, Pakistani-led march against US drone attacks is being planned, starting September 23 from Islamabad to Northern Waziristan. Under the armed monitoring of drones above and military forces on the ground, the caravan will be led by Pashtun villager victims, the independent presidential candidate Imran Khan, and CODEPINK [1] and British anti-war activists.

According to CODEPINK, 50 American activists have already applied for visas to bear witnesses to ground zero of the drone war, which US intelligence officials claim have caused virtually zero civilian casualties. Those numbers are being contested by many in the mainstream media, security analysts at the New America Foundation [2] and the Long War Journal [3], along with Pakistan-based lawyers and observers.

The trek, if permitted by the US, will bring new attention to - and some say, blow the cover off - the secrets concerning casualties from the drone war. The proposed plan bears similarities to the uncovering of civilian casualties in North Vietnam exposed by the *New York Times'* Harrison Salisbury in 1965 and Jane Fonda in 1972.

Khan, the former cricket star and playboy, is the most popular national leader in Pakistan polling as the 2013 presidential election nears. Khan, who has rallied against the drone attacks on numerous occasions, was the subject of a gossip-driven *New York Times Magazine* portrait on August 16 [4], which acknowledged his ascendancy. Despite fears of his populism, nationalism and cult of personality, he will offer the red carpet for US withdrawal if he is elected. This is precisely the problem vexing US officials seeking to control the 2014 timetable of events.

A scenario for ending drone attacks and the war itself is becoming clearer as the stalemate deepens. The US will have to engage directly or indirectly with the Taliban, the Haqqani network, and local insurgents, accepting an arrangement including power-sharing and temporary partition. In that scenario, the US will end the drone attacks without officially admitting their failure, claiming instead that the Hellfire missiles pushed the Taliban to the table. An international peacekeeping force from non-aligned countries will attempt to fill the vacuum as the Americans depart. Secretary Hillary Clinton will insist on protecting and advancing the now-meager rights of Afghan women as part of any future donor funding, although the Karzai government recently adopted legislation declaring that women are secondary to men. (*New York Times*, August 16, 2012 [5])

Meanwhile, the 2014 withdrawal deadline is already spurring crisis as the West retreats. NATO is cracking, with the new French government pulling out 2,000 troops by December and the remaining 800 not long after, and New Zealand announcing this week that its contingent will leave in early 2013 rather than that October.

Insurgent attacks rose 11 percent this summer compared to the same period in 2011. In the past six months there have been at least 255 targeted killings of Afghan civilians, a 53 percent jump from last year, mirroring the US counterterrorism strategy of decimating as much of the Taliban's infrastructure as possible. Insider, or blue-on-green, attacks by Afghan security forces against US officials in

panic mode. And the tragic suicide rate among US soldiers is at an all time high, morbid evidence that the war is being internalized, drawn to a bloody end due to the failure of the political and military establishments to terminate it responsibly. (New York Times, August 19, 2012)

In a further sign of what Barbara Tuchman called "the march to folly," the US allies in Baghdad are funneling millions of American dollars to Iran through Iraqi financial institutions. And despite the Western embargo, Iran will be hosting and chairing the Non-Aligned Movements summit in Teheran next week, with some 120 delegations represented - including Iraq's Shiite regime and Egypt's new president, Mohamed Morsi. (Associated Press, August 18, 2012 [6])

The coming international protest against US drone strikes may gain surprising force due to these converging events.

Tom Hayden

P.S.

* WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2012 AT 4:54PM.

<http://tomhayden.com/home/american-activists-to-attempt-anti-drone-march-across-pakist.html>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.codepink4peace.org/>

[2] <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/>

[3] <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes.php>

[4] http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/magazine/pakistans-imran-khan-must-be-doing-something-right.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all

[5] <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/16/opinion/the-women-of-afghanistan.html>

[6] <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/world/middleeast/president-mohamed-morsi-of-egypt-plans-to-visit-iran.html>