Beijing’s Muteness on Drone Attacks inside Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the issue of China silence over the drone attacks inside its most reliable and time tested friend Pakistan. The drone technology used by the American was one of the steps in their long strategy of Afghanistan when they faced the issue of insurgency from the neighbour country Pakistan. Technically speaking, drone proved useful and launched as a new weapon but started a new international arm race. However the legality and moral questions are still debating in the nations and United Nations. The response of China to the US presence in Afghanistan was very supportive, cooperative and not as a spoiler. On drone attacks inside Pakistan, Chinese opted not to comment due its own mechanization and exporting of drone technology to the other parts of the world for their own economic interests; and possible use of it against the Uyghur separatist in the future to put an end to the long term sovereignty issue of China. The Chinese do care about the drone strikes in Pakistan when they providing any reply to the US questions of human rights in China.

KEYWORDS: USA, China, Pakistan, Drone Attacks, Al-Qaeda, War on Terror, Response.

1. INTRODUCTION

The US came to Afghanistan as result of the 9/11 attacks to put an end to the menace of terrorism and contained it so that not to expand to the regions of South Asia, South East Asia and Central Asia. About the immediate objectives of invading Afghanistan they got it and overthrow the government of Taliban backed Al-Qaeda but to make Afghanistan as stable actor of the international politics and regional politics is still a dream for the people of Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan not only damaged Afghanistan but also its Eastern neighbour, Pakistan that pay the about 80 billion US$ and thousands of its citizens. (Crotty, 2004)

On the one hand China is considered to be the master financer of this war because China provided 500 out of 800 Billion$ to the US for fighting the war on terror in Afghanistan. While on the other hand China also claimed Pakistan the most reliable ally and time tested friend in the region. Both the states have their understanding on each and every issue that emerges in the region or outside the region. Despite of all these close relations Chinese have their own calculations and estimations for the US global war on terror and Pakistan is one actor in the war in Afghanistan. The people of Pakistan and government expected some support from China when the war on terror cross the border of Afghanistan and enter to Pakistan by violating the sovereignty of an independent state. The response of China on drone attacks inside Pakistan muted due to its own priorities. (Lampton, 2003)

Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighbouring countries and anarchy, chaos of one country affects the other. After 9/11 Taliban overthrew from the power by the US and allied forces in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime was toppled by the logistic and strategic support of Musharraf-led government. The Taliban of Afghanistan propagated the anti-western agenda in Pakistan through political and religious parties; however, the religious factions on both sides of the Durand Line have the same ideology. (Rana, 2009)

The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was established in Pakistan which also challenged the writ of Pakistani government. Before the establishment of TTP, the Pakistani military also launched various operations in Waziristan to trample the igniting Taliban force. Due to the military operations on tribal areas and Lal Mosque operation the TTP launched a war against the Pakistani government and announced the constitution and judicial system of Pakistan as un-Islamic. TTP also categorized the government as the ally of the infidel force (US). Different factions of Taliban operated in different areas of Pakistan like the Haqqani faction involved in terrorists activities in North Waziristan agency and was also active in Afghanistan. All the factions of Taliban were trained and financed by Al-Qaida to defeat NATO in Afghanistan and they also challenged the writ of Pakistan with the agenda of establishing Islamic Shariat in both countries.(Shah, 2010)

The US war on terror spread to the Pakistani territories including all tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The CIA targeted tribal areas along the line of control by collecting intelligence information and on the basis of the spied information, the US start raining drones to kill terrorists in North Waziristan which was (is) a sheer violation of
Pakistan aerial borders. These drone attacks started in George W. Bush’s era and get accelerated in the government of Obama. At the beginning, the Pakistani government publicly termed it as violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty, but covertly allowed the US to strike drones wherever the US suspected the terrorists. Due to the frequent drone attacks, the image of the US maligned beyond repair in Pakistan. (Rana, 2009)

Justifications for the Drone Attacks

The legitimacy of drone attacks poses serious questions inside Pakistan for the US and the rest of the world. The US justified the drone attacks on the pretext to root out terrorist for her self-defense; wherever, they are hiding. For justification of killing the targeted and accurate terrorists, the Presidents of the US, Bush and Obama argued that it is a global war against terrorism and should be taken as uninterrupted war. The former US state department legal advisor, Harold Koh expressed as, “It is an issue of international law, the U.S. is in an armed conflict with al Qaeda, as well as the Taliban and associated forces with it, and considers its right to self-defense under international law.(Shah, 2010)

According to the US government the Article 51 of the UN endorses of using drone attacks against terrorists inside Pakistan and Afghanistan. This Article also justifies the drones that attacks will be undertaken within the territories of foreign government, if they failed or unwilling to take the action against terrorists. The US mentioned Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan as the best examples which allowed drones within their territories to curb terrorists, while in the case of Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq; the US is already fighting the war on terror. Therefore, the use of predator is legalized by the US for destroying the nurseries of terrorism.(Shah, 2010)

Actually, the unilateral use of drones against the consent of a sovereign state is a clear violation of the UN charter, and is contrary to the assent of UN Security Council. The US argument of legalizing drones is only on the basis of preventive or reactionary attacks, but the justification of reactionary attacks in the milieu of war on terror is not recognized as a legal force. The US claimed that drone attacks have broken the back of TTP, Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaida but it is also undeniable fact that these reapers have killed many innocent women, children and elder people. So to allow an unbridle permission to the US, then the civilian causalities and deaths will certainly ensue owing to the miscalculation and misinformation of Drones. (Johnston, 2012)

Development of Drone

In the midst of 19th century when the Austrian assaulted the Italian city of Venice by using balloons carrying explosives, the history of unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) came into the lexicon of man’s technological science. Initially, it was difficult to differentiate between the UAV and a missile. The American started to develop the technology in 20th century. The US navy had developed the concept of flying bombs before the First World War. (Shah, 2010)

When the German trenches were destroyed by the US navy in the Second World War, as a response the Germans used flying bombs and devastated London and other British cities. After the induction of aircrafts and flying bomb in the machinery of war, the traditional military culture was replaced by the air power. In the post WW II scenario two technologies emerged; the Cruise missile that could be fired from a long distance with high velocity and the second was the unmanned aircraft technology which were slower than Cruise missiles but very effective for surveillance and intelligence gathering in the territories of enemies. (Sarwar, 2009)

During the cold war era flying bombs officially known as drones was a replica of aircrafts, and the US improved UAV technology in the Vietnam War to save the US from human losses in the war. After the Arab Israel conflict in 1973, the US upgraded the UAVs having the modern technology of a traditional aircraft. The latest UAVs were also used in Iraq war by the US in 1991. After successful rally in the Gulf War, the US advanced the modern Predator drone through the Advanced Technology Demonstrator Program that improved it in calculating and electronic controlling system. (Sarwar, 2009)

9/11 and the use of Drones

The drone technology has been used for two major purposes. The first goal is to kill the terrorists and secondly to lessen the threat for the US forces where they cannot operate or access easily. The strategy of using drone technology underwent five phases. Firstly, the drones were used to assault on the high value targets of Al Qaeda and Taliban members when the US attacked Afghanistan. Drones were killing the targets covertly. Secondly reapers were used in Iraq war in 2007 to target the high value anti-American forces; nonetheless, the transportation of predators was expanded from Afghanistan to Iraq and then to Pakistan. Thirdly, during the last year of Bush administration, the shots of drones increased in wake of both Afghanistan and Iraq. (Issacharoff, 2013)

From 2001-2007 total nine drones strikes occurred while it jumped up to 37 airstrikes in 2008. In this phase drones played a better role to kill asymmetric militant groups in Pak-Afghan border insurgencies. The fourth phase
started when Obama elected the US President in March 2009. In this phase drones rapidly accelerated and approximately 370 drone attacks both in Pakistan and Afghanistan occurred which targeted high value targets. The fifth phase is called “America Third World War” in which non-battlefield targets became the important characteristic of the US post-9/11 military policy in Afghanistan and Iraq. (Sarwar, 2009)

The lethal attacks of drones are operated in six countries; Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Yemen and Somalia. Three countries among them were declared as a war zone. The drone attacks were operated by the two most powerful organizations; Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and the CIA. The former is an organization of military nature which conducted operations in the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and at the same time the military attacks were backed by the people of America. In these two war zone countries drone has many roles, supportive in warfare operations, provide information and also attacks targets through the guided missiles. (Ahmed, 2013)

The JOSC also operated this war according to the specified rules and regulations. The second organization is CIA which targets the suspected terrorists or anti-American forces in those countries where the US is not militarily engaged. The secret nature of operations that lacks accountability is condemned by the masses of the US. These operations raised the eyebrows of public who object on the nature of operation accomplished by the CIA. (Wall, 2011)

The public by and large are doubtful that how they choose the target, where they operate and how many people are killed or injured in the CIA planned attacks. The CIA war reflected on the limelight when they speed up the strikes of deadly drones in Pakistan and Somalia. The world and human rights organizations condemned the Obama’s administration for pursuing the policy of drones, and the US has failed to justify the strike of reapers in the non-combating zones that is a sheer violation of international law. (Ahmed, 2013)

**Drone inside Pakistan**

The CIA operated drones attacks inside Pakistan’s tribal areas and sometimes in settled areas like Hangu which has inflicted the innocent people with a few high level targeted terrorists. The US and the NATO forces in Afghanistan consider that the attacks launched against them are carried out from the unsettled areas of Pakistan. According to the US, Pakistan is an ally in war on terror, but at the same time has given safe haven to the most wanted terrorists like Osama Bin Laden who was killed in the Abbottabad operation, and to other prominent leaders of Al-Qaida and Taliban. The Bush and Obama administration on these pretexts justify the predators to operate in a sovereign state without the support of public in the US and Pakistan. The drones are not only deadly for the deaths of innocent children, women and elders in Pakistan’s tribal areas but on the international perspective, it is amount to violation of sovereignty of Pakistan. (O’Connell, 2009)

The US administration also claimed that the Musharraf led regime and the succeeding PPP and Nawaz governments also allowed the drones attacks on the terrain territories of tribal areas. The public outrage was always neglected by every government, but whenever Salala like event occurred, the NATO supply was hampered for a few months in protest of drone attacks. However, the toothless regimes of Musharraf, Zardari and now Nawaz Sharif have given a free hand, and drones were/are hovering over the boundaries of Pakistan. Drones are internationally recognized as acts against humanity and many powers in the world have condemned them, but the raining of drones is not going to cease due to the stubbornness of American policies. (Johnston, 2012)

**China’s Response**

The Chinese response to the US drone attacks inside Pakistan is very complex and not clear due to its own priorities in relations with the US in terror strategy in Afghanistan. The issue of drone attacks concerned China in so many aspects including, the Uyghur separatist’s movement of Western China, the sale of drone in future, the human rights issue and drone. (Qureshi, 2013)

The US launched the drone attacks inside Pakistan from 2004 and still continues to hit individuals and groups of Al-Qaeda members who made their sanctuaries between Pak-Afghan borders including seven tribal agencies of Pakistan. CIA launched 407 attacks inside Pakistan but there is no consensus about the target killing and civilian causalities including women and children. The Chinese leadership took the 9/11 and its aftermath both as a challenge and opportunity. The Chinese adopted the Good Neighbor Policy that was designed for all the border disputes for installment of friendly relations with neighbors and to minimize the dependency on the Middle East for the oil and energy resources. For them the presence of American in Afghanistan is more challenging than opportunity due to US establishment of bases in the central Asian Republics that minimize the role of Shangaye Cooperation Organization (SCO). (Qureshi, 2013)

About the drone attacks inside Pakistan the Chinese has no clear cut stance due to so many reasons. They have their own calculations on the war on terror and pursue their own priorities and interests with Americans. They see drone
firstly, through the lenses of Human Rights issue, secondly, the achieving of drone technology and its use on the Western China Uyghur’s separatist movement and thirdly, the selling of this technology to the other states of the world in future. The Chinese also reluctant to announce a clear policy on drone inside Pakistan as they know Pakistani leadership also have no clear policy about the drone; how can the Chinese pursue a clear policy.(Qureshi, 2013)

Importantly the people of Pakistan were expecting the newly elected Prime Minister’s first official visit to China to secure the support of China to stop American regarding the use of drone inside Pakistan so that Pakistan’s territorial integrity. There is no confirmation that weather the two leadership of Sino-Pak discussed the drone issue or not. The joint statement of the visit emphasized that, “China vowed to continue extending its full support to Pakistan in the latter’s efforts to uphold its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity,” It was basically a diplomatic and traditional response of China about Pakistan sovereignty. When the media asked from Nawaz Sharif about the issue, his reply was that, “we have to help ourselves if we want to stop American drones”. On the other hand when a media person asked from the Foreign Office spokesman about the support of China with reference to drone attacks inside Pakistan, the spokesman replied;

“As for China’s stance on drone strikes, the Chinese government will be in the best position to answer. However, I can say that the Chinese government has always voiced its support for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan.”(Qureshi, 2013)

All these questions show that the Chinese government is silent about the drone attacks inside Pakistan that discouraged the hearts of so many people in Pakistan and even the prime minister himself who considered the Sino-Pak relations deeper than the ocean, higher than the mountains and sweeter than the honey. There are so many factors behind this silent policy (Observe Calmly) that was shaped by the Deng in his sixteen words directives issued in response to the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 that avoid direct clash with the West and with Americans. Keeping in mind those directives as a base of their foreign policy, the Chinese leadership avoided open criticism on the US policies about war on terror. (Wan, 2011)

The drone has no exceptional status for the Chinese in the long war of terror. The other reasons are; firstly, for the Chinese the most important internal and long term problem is that directly related to the PRC national sovereignty is the Western China East Turkistan Uyghur separatist movement that destabilizethe western resources rich area. The PRC seeks opportunity in the war on terror to declare this Organization as a terrorist organization and the activists as terrorists and would also seek to use similar weapons to eliminate the threat by force. The American drone policy inside Pakistan suit the PRC as it killed one of the important and wanted leader of Eastern Turkistan Islamic party, Abdul Haq al-Turkistani. It basically benefits PRC that’s why they are silent about drone inside Pakistan. (Hsu, 2013)

Secondly, if China opposes the US policy of drone in Pakistan it would definitely stop its way to use similar source of weapons on the western China movements and also on the people who are involved in the Tibet issue. They are not closing the door for themselves to use these drone against the Uyghur who are posing threat to the PRC national sovereignty within the state. The PRC is prepared a ground for itself to get support and justification from the international community and USA in advance for using the drone inside China. (Sharkey, 2011)

Finally, unlike other countries who adopted strict rules about the production of drone technology, PRC has no such restrictions on the producing and selling of drone to the other countries that are suffering from internal and external threats. The US legitimizes its drone policy from international community as a target killing of Al Qaeda members in those countries where the American are not in a state of war. The PRC also legitimize the selling of drone technology for development of its arms industries; that is why they do not criticize the US drone policy in the war on terror.(Sharkey, 2011)

On the other hand, China speaks about the drone policy from opposite direction whenever they feel threat to their own expected interests about the issue. The issue of human rights is one of the divergent issues in Sino-US relations during Mao era and then it was popularized after the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 when the US and the whole western world imposed sanctions on China for suppressing the pro-democracy strikes in China. (Erickson, 2013)

According to the American annuls Human Rights report that, the PRC did well with reference to human rights issue such as the closing down of some labour camps and a change to the one-child policy but still it is the routine of PRC to repress organizations and individuals who are fighting for their political rights. The report also stated that China continuously suppressing the minority community of Uyghur and Tibet.(Wan, 2011) In response to this report the PRC strongly condemn the allegations of US regarding the human rights when the foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang accused the US of hypocrisy and said that,

"The US is always making irresponsible remarks on the affairs of other countries but keeps silent on its own affairs," he told reporters at a regular briefing. "This is a typical double standard."(Nd, 2011)
They also gave the example of Human rights violation in Pakistan drone attacks that killed hundreds of innocent citizens including women and children in Pakistan. So, they talk when they feel threat to their own interests regarding the human rights. It’s not about the human right issue but it is the question of national sovereignty for the PRC. (Nd, 2011)

Conclusion

To portray conclusion from the data, perceptions and analysis, presented in the above discussion first three portions sum up the Justification of drone attacks inside Pakistan, the developments that produced the modern Drone technology to the 9/11 2001 to the use of drone inside Pakistan China response on drone strikes inside Pakistan. In last part an attempt is made to answer the question, through discussed data and information, why China silent on the use of drone attacks inside Pakistan?

Pursuing the war on terror and to counter the insurgency in Afghanistan, and to a certain extent to test and perfect its new war technology, the US introduced the Drones. This was new war technology the world reaction and legalities has to tackle. The Washington came up with a justification for its use that in Afghanistan they are in a state of war with Al-Qaeda, while in Pakistan they referred to the article 5 of the UN charter and also the authorization of the Congress. However, US faced a huge pressure about the legal and moral justification of violating the sovereignty of independent states and using Drones inside Pakistan and Afghanistan.

On technical grounds this technology proved useful and introduced a new weapon which in turn started a new international race. However its use still raises big legal and moral questions and nations and United Nations is still debating over its legal and authorized use. Americans are committed to continue the Drone attacks inside Pakistan by the time these lines are being written. Pakistan’s rejoinder over Drone Attacks is a bit complex diplomatic and military issue, debated by so many scholars and experts in US and Pakistan as well as international community and forums.

Without going to any extreme views, about Drones it is clear that though it was agreed by the government of Pakistan but it was not ready to accept in public, in fear of more violent response from extremist and terrorist groups active in Pakistan. This arrangement proved very successful as sharing of intelligence from Pakistan and use of Drones by US would have resulted in killing of common enemies. The use of Drones not only were creating difficulties for Pakistan to keep poise with its supporting groups; but it also resulted in political mistrust and policy inconsistency at decision-making bodies in Islamabad. Drones were termed as purely US operations and against the territorial integrity of Pakistan. It was also added that Drones result in casualties of civilians, largely true but never mentioned before in international forums. At that stage the legal, moral and strategic rationales as well as ethics were questioned around the globe about use of Drones.

On drone attacks inside Pakistan, Chinese preferred to not to comment due its own manufacturing and selling of drone technology; and possible use of it against the Uyghur separatist in the future. While Pakistan considered it a good deal of attacking common enemies without taking open responsibility and thus avoiding brutal and bloody retaliation from terrorist in Pakistan. However Pakistan stance changed over the issue when instead of common enemies, drones were used against friendly groups and strategic assets of Pakistan.

At that state Pakistan termed it violation of sovereignty and demanded to stop the use of drone attacks within Pakistani land that kills innocent people including women and children. The Chinese speaks about the legality and authorization of drone attacks inside Pakistan and voiced it as a clear violation of an independent state sovereignty when the US directly blaming Chinese for the violation of human rights. As a result they see each and every development that happen in the region or in the international politics through the lenses of economy due to their economic oriented policies adopted by Deng Zhou ping from 1980s.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


