

# *Declassified report on covert U.S. drone strike leading to civilian deaths in Nigeria*

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Reaper UAV drone, File Image

Washington, August 4 (RHC)-- Drone attacks represent a perennial strand in the history of conflicts the U.S. has undertaken far from its borders, but the details of how Washington has used its drone program to assassinate suspected terrorists overseas, and the true gravity of the disastrous consequences of such actions, remain mostly unknown.

The U.S. drone program was originally instituted under George W. Bush during his so called War on Terror. However, the administrations that came after his significantly increased the total number of drone strikes.

Since the inception of the program, U.S. officials have repeatedly claimed that the strikes have been used exclusively against terrorists and with fewer casualties, collateral damage, than other procedures.

But numerous reports over the past year suggest that an overwhelming majority of the deaths have indeed been civilians.

According to The Intercept, U.S. drones were secretly involved in the Raan IDP bombing in 2017 which killed more than 160 civilians, many of them children. The attack also left nine MSF aid workers dead and had seriously wounded 120 other individuals.

US surveillance and intelligence gathering operations have often been deployed in and around Nigeria since 2014, ostensibly to search for children kidnapped by terrorists.

But in the Raan incident, a surveillance plane reportedly circled around the IDP camp which housed 43,000 people before a jet arrived and bombed the area twice, also killing the tens of displaced civilians sheltering there.

The Nigerian Air Force expressed regret for carrying out the strike, but the attack was referred to as an instance of US/Nigerian operations in a recently declassified secret US military document.

However, the question remains why U.S. involvement in the fiasco is being revealed just now, in 2022; five years after the disaster actually took place? The reason it's come out now is because Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, is just about to put out a memorandum on improving civilian harm mitigation.

So the government wants people to be aware that, yes, they know there is harm that they're doing, and now they're going to do better.

Judith Bello of the United National Anti-war Movement said: "So this particular event is really quite horrific, that it happened at all, and it's hard to explain why those planes would have been bombing a refugee camp, which clearly the government knew about, the United States knew about it, everybody was well aware that this large and well serviced refugee camp was there. So it's a terrible thing."

The U.S. drone program was kept secret until 2013. It was the Obama administration that acknowledged the existence of the program, after years of denial by the Bush administration. However, the documents that have been acquired over the past years imply that what little has been revealed by the government is likely distorted.

Many have called for greater transparency surrounding the programs; a series of overseas assassinations, which primarily killed civilians, could easily be one of America's worst war crimes.

A new report released by Columbia Law School's Human Rights Clinic has called on the U.S. government to provide an official accounting on who is being killed by drone strikes. The report states that in light of the government's unwillingness, and refusal, to provide information on casualties, some tracking organizations have filled the gap, but their estimates are incomplete and, mostly, significantly undercounted.

While stating that lower numbers provide assurances to the public and lawmakers that drone strikes are not harming civilians, the report says the U.S. government owes the public an accounting of who is being killed.

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