

# Drone attacks create terrorist safe havens, warns former CIA official

Indiscriminate use of drones in Middle East causes too many civilian casualties, warns former CIA counterterrorism head

Paul Harris in New York

guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 5 June 2012 15:56 EDT



Protestors against US drone attacks in Pakistan burn a US flag. Photograph: Mk Chaudhry/EPA

A former top terrorism official at the [CIA](#) has warned that President Barack Obama's controversial drone programme is far too indiscriminate in hitting targets and could lead to such political instability that it creates terrorist safe havens.

Obama's increased use of drones to attack suspected Islamic militants in [Pakistan](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#) and [Yemen](#) has become one of the most controversial aspects of his national security policy. He has launched at least 275 strikes in Pakistan alone; a rate of attack that is far higher than his predecessor George W Bush.

Defenders of the policy say it provides a way of hitting high-profile targets, such as [al-Qaida number two, Abu Yahya al-Libi](#). But critics say the definition of militant is used far too broadly and there are too many civilian casualties. The London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates up to 830 civilians, including many women and children, might have been killed by drone attacks in Pakistan, 138 in Yemen and 57 in Somalia. Hundreds more have been injured.

Now Robert Grenier, who headed the CIA's counter-terrorism center from 2004 to 2006 and was previously a CIA station chief in Pakistan, has told the Guardian that the drone programme is targeted too broadly. "It [the drone program] needs to be targeted much more finely. We have been seduced by them and the unintended consequences of our actions are going to outweigh the intended consequences," Grenier said in an interview.

Grenier emphasised that the use of drones was a valuable tool in tackling terrorism but only when used against specific identified targets, who have been tracked and monitored to a place where a strike is feasible. However, recent media revelations about Obama's programme have revealed a more widespread use of the strike capability, including the

categorising of all military-age males in a strike zone of a target as militants. That sort of broad definition and the greater use of drones has outraged human rights organisations.

The BIJ has reported that drone strikes in Pakistan over the weekend hit a funeral gathering for a militant slain in a previous strike and also may have accidentally hit a mosque. That sort of action adds credence to the claims that the drone campaign is likely to cause more damage by creating anger at the US than it does in eliminating terrorist threats.

"We have gone a long way down the road of creating a situation where we are creating more enemies than we are removing from the battlefield. We are already there with regards to Pakistan and Afghanistan," he said.

Grenier said he had particular concerns about Yemen, where [al-Qaida](#) linked groups have launched an insurgency and captured swathes of territory from the over-stretched local army. US drones have been active in the country, striking at targets that have included killing US-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and his 16-year-old son.

The BIJ estimates that there have been up to 41 confirmed US drone strikes in Yemen since 2002 and possibly up to 55 unconfirmed ones. Grenier said the strikes were too indiscriminate and causing outrage among the civilian population in the country, lending support to Islamists and seeing a growth in anti-US sentiment.

"That brings you to a place where young men, who are typically armed, are in the same area and may hold these militants in a certain form of high regard. If you strike them indiscriminately you are running the risk of creating a terrific amount of popular anger. They have tribes and clans and large families. Now all of a sudden you have a big problem ... I am very concerned about the creation of a larger terrorist safe haven in Yemen," Grenier said.

Grenier was the CIA's station chief in Islamabad when terrorists struck the World Trade Center in New York and attacked the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. He played a key role in co-ordinating covert operations that led up to the downfall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. He later headed up the CIA's CTC where he led the CIA's global operations in the War on Terror as its top counter-terrorism official. He left the agency in 2006.