

MORE DAMAGE FROM PANETTA'S VACCINE RUSE: UN DOCTOR ON POLIO VACCINE DRIVE SHOT; HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS DENIED POLIO VACCINE

As one of only three countries in the world where polio is still endemic, Pakistan launched a three day vaccination drive yesterday with a target of vaccinating the 318,000 children in North and South Waziristan who have not received their vaccinations. Across all of Pakistan, the goal is to vaccinate 34 million children under the age of five. The drive is being held despite a push by the Taliban to prevent vaccinations in tribal areas. The Taliban's ban on vaccinations is aimed at stopping US drone strikes in the tribal areas and is in response to the vaccination ruse by the CIA. Dr. Shakeel Afridi pretended to be doling out hepatitis vaccines in a failed attempt to retrieve DNA samples for the CIA from the bin Laden compound when it was under surveillance prior to the attack that killed Osama bin Laden. Today, a UN doctor and his driver were wounded when a shooter opened fire on them in Karachi. The doctor was reported to be working on the vaccine program.

Dawn reported yesterday that a jirga was convened today in the tribal areas to try to find a solution to the Taliban's vaccine ban. That article gives good background information on the ban:

Although a nationwide anti-polio campaign was launched on Monday, the authorities were yet to convince the Taliban shura on the importance of getting children of North and South

Waziristan vaccinated against the debilitating disease.

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Commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur, who leads the powerful Taliban Shura, had banned the anti-polio drive in North Waziristan on June 16 and said that children would not take polio drops unless the government stopped drone strikes in the area.

He was followed by Commander Mullah Nazir in South Waziristan and other militant commanders in FRs D.I. Khan and Kohat.

In South Waziristan, the ban is much stricter because it prohibits vaccination against all eight childhood diseases, including polio.

“We have asked health workers to be careful and don’t put their lives at risk,” the official said, adding that they were waiting for the government’s response.

However, the Taliban ban is not the only barrier to vaccines:

He [the official quoted above] said the military operation in Orakzai and Khyber agencies was one of the factors which deprived children of the much needed vaccines.

Just the two tribal agencies of North and South Waziristan account for a large number of unvaccinated children:

According to sources, the political agent of North Waziristan has convened a jirga of local ulema and notables on Tuesday to find a solution to the problem posed by the Taliban vaccination ban that has deprived about 318,000

children of getting polio drops in the two agencies.

Although the warning above to doctors to be careful was issued in relation to vaccinations in the tribal areas, a doctor in the vaccination program came under fire today in Karachi:

Gunmen opened fire on a UN vehicle in Karachi Tuesday, wounding a foreign doctor working on a polio immunisation campaign and a local driver, officials said.

The shooting happened in the Soharb Goth neighbourhood of eastern Karachi on the second day of a widely publicised polio vaccination campaign.

Attacks on foreigners are rare in Karachi, but human rights activists say ethnic, sectarian and politically-linked violence has killed at least 740 people in the city so far this year alone.

"A WHO vehicle was fired upon with gunshots. One international staff and one local driver were injured in the incident," Maryam Yunus, spokeswoman for the United Nations' World Health Organisation, told AFP.

She said the doctor from Ghana and the Pakistani doctor[sic] had been transferred to a private hospital where their condition was stable.

The article on the shooting describes the vaccination ban as in protest of drones and in response to Afridi's actions:

Local Taliban and Pakistani warlord Hafiz Gul Bahadur banned the vaccinations in the region of Waziristan to protest against US drone attacks.

They have condemned the immunisation campaign, which began nationwide on

Monday, as a cover for espionage.

Pakistani doctor Shakeel Afridi was jailed for 33 years in May after helping the CIA find Osama bin Laden using a hepatitis vaccination programme as cover.

Fighting between government troops and local warlord Mangal Bagh also made it difficult to inoculate all children in Khyber district, officials said.

It seems that Leon Panetta's approval of and subsequent public confirmation of Afridi's vaccine ruse is a problem that just continues to affect the lives of more and more children every day. Although the Pakistani government's vaccine drive is legitimate and urgently needed, Panetta's poor judgment is putting that drive at risk and assuring that it will fall far short of the rate of vaccination needed to prevent a record year for polio cases in Pakistan.