

FIVE POLIO WORKERS IN PAKISTAN KILLED IN FURTHER FALLOUT FROM PANETTA'S LEAK

Providing more evidence that perhaps the best move President Obama can make for world affairs is to quickly appoint a new Secretary of Defense so that Leon Panetta can retire to a soundproof booth, five more polio workers in Pakistan paid with their lives for Panetta's leak that conclusively tied Dr. Shakil Afridi and a vaccination ruse to the CIA effort to identify and kill Osama bin Laden. The tragic shootings in Pakistan consisted of three separate incidents in Karachi and one in Peshawar.

Dawn summarizes various news services' reports on the shootings:

Four were killed in three different incidents in the port city of Karachi and the fifth in the northwestern city of Peshawar, on the second day of a nationwide three-day drive against the disease, which is endemic in Pakistan.

All of the victims were Pakistanis working with a UN-backed programme to eradicate polio.

Sagheer Ahmed, the health minister for Sindh province said he had ordered a halt to the anti-polio drive in the city in the wake of the shootings.

These killings come on the heels of previous incidents:

On Monday, police said a gunman killed a volunteer for the World Health Organization's anti-polio campaign was shot dead on the city outskirts in Gadap Town.

Earlier in July 2012, a local paramedic associated with the polio vaccination was shot dead and a World Health Organisation doctor, Fosten Dido, from Ghana along with his driver were wounded in two separate attacks in the Sohrab Goth area.

WHO, a partner in government efforts to eradicate the disease, suspended vaccination activities in part of Pakistan's largest city in July after a spate of bloody shootings.

These killings come just under three weeks since it was announced that Dr. Afridi had started a hunger strike at Peshawar Central Jail after the jail retaliated against him for his telephone interview with Fox News. Since the report of the start of the hunger strike, the jail has fired the guard whose phone was used for the interview, but I've seen no further reports on the status (or whereabouts) of Afridi. That is striking, since the report on Afridi's hunger strike appeared within 24 hours of its apparent start. Further, we learn from the New York Times today that US funds for Pakistan's military have once again begun to flow, despite repeated threats from various members of Congress that these funds would be blocked until Afridi is released from jail. These events also take place in the wake of Panetta's ham-handed "clarification" last week on the status of Pakistan's cooperation in anti-terrorism activity.

The Times article tells us that the Pentagon notified Congress of the release of funds to Pakistan on December 7, just a week after the Afridi hunger strike started on November 30. Is Afridi still in Peshawar Central Jail or has he been quietly released and removed from the country as part of the normalization of US-Pakistan relations?