

DRONING CELL PHONE CALLS

Noah Shachtman is going to convince me to give up my cell phone. Today he notes an AP story reporting that Palestinians believe Israel's spy drones are jamming cell phone lines and then using them to take out targets.

Palestinians say they know when an Israeli drone is in the air: Cell phones stop working, TV reception falters and they can hear a distant buzzing. They also know what's likely to come next – a devastating explosion on the ground.

Palestinians say Israel's pilotless planes have been a major weapon in its latest offensive in Gaza, which has killed nearly 120 people since last week.

[snip]

Wary Gaza militants using binoculars are on constant lookout for drones. When one is sighted overhead, the militants report via walkie-talkie to their comrades, warning them to turn off their cell phones and remove the batteries for fear the Israeli technology will trace their whereabouts.

The AP goes on to note that the US has used such Predator drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan as well—though the AP doesn't explicitly say these drones triggered using cell phone signals.

In January, a missile fired from a Predator killed Abu Laith al-Libi, a top al-Qaida commander, in Pakistan's lawless tribal region of north Waziristan. Coalition forces in Afghanistan are believed to have launched a number of missile strikes

from drones against Taliban and al-Qaida militants hiding on the Pakistani side of the border, but the U.S. military has never confirmed them.

This report follows on one from last week, in which the Taliban demanded cell phone operators in Afghanistan turn off cell signal for 10 hours a day—or they'd take the towers out.

Taliban militants threatened Monday to blow up telecom towers across Afghanistan if mobile phone companies do not switch off their signals for 10 hours starting at dusk.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujaheed said the U.S. and other foreign troops in the country are using mobile phone signals to track down the insurgents and launch attacks against them.

Since that time, the Taliban have taken out at least two cell towers (h/t oscar).

Two mobile phone antennas were destroyed in southern Afghanistan, officials said Sunday, after Taliban militants threatened to bring down such masts, alleging they are used to locate hideouts.

A first mast was destroyed in the southern province of Kandahar on Friday, four days after the Taliban warned they would attack the technology because it was being used at night to pinpoint rebel bases.

In the new attacks, armed rebels scaled a mast just outside Kandahar city overnight and destroyed equipment, local police officer Ghulam Hazrat said.

"I'm sure it was the work of the Taliban," he told AFP, adding that guards at the facility had escaped unhurt.

Another antenna was destroyed in the neighbouring Helmand province's Sangin district, a local official told AFP under condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to media.

It looks like insurgents are going to begin to destroy what little infrastructure exists in Afghanistan, Pakistan's tribal areas, Iraq, and Gaza to prevent this from happening. It sure highlights the degree to which telecom infrastructure is the front line of George Bush's global war.