

Daniel Hale's Letter to the Judge

by *Daniel Hale*, published on the *Sparrow Project*, July 23, 2021

It is not a secret that I struggle to live with depression and post traumatic stress disorder. Both stem from my childhood experience growing up in a rural mountain community and were compounded by exposure to combat during military service. Depression is a constant. Though stress, particularly stress caused by war, can manifest itself at different times and in different ways. The tell-tale signs of a person afflicted by PTSD and depression can often be outwardly observed and are practically universally recognizable. Hard lines about the face and jaw. Eyes, once bright and wide, now deepset and fearful. And an inexplicably sudden loss of interest in things that used to spark joy. These are the noticeable changes in my demeanor marked by those who knew me before and after military service. To say that the period of my life spent serving in the United States Air Force had an impression on me would be an understatement. It is more accurate to say that it irreversibly transformed my identity as an American. Having forever altered the thread of my life's story, weaved into the fabric of our nation's history. To better appreciate the significance of how this came to pass, I would like to explain my experience deployed to Afghanistan as it was in 2012 and how it is I came to violate the Espionage Act, as a result.

In my capacity as a signals intelligence analyst stationed at Bagram Airbase, I was made to track down the geographic location of handset cellphone devices believed to be in the possession of so-called enemy combatants. To accomplish this mission required access to a complex chain of globe-spanning satellites capable of maintaining an unbroken connection with remotely piloted aircraft, commonly referred to as drones.

Once a steady connection is made and a targeted cell phone device is acquired, an imagery analyst in the U.S., in coordination with a drone pilot and camera operator, would take over using information I provided to surveil everything that occurred within the drone's field of vision. This was done, most often, to document the day-to-day lives of suspected militants. Sometimes, under the right conditions, an attempt at capture would be made. Other times, a decision to strike and kill them where they stood would be weighed.

The first time that I witnessed a drone strike came within days of my arrival to Afghanistan. Early that morning, before dawn, a group of men had gathered together in the mountain ranges of Patika province around a campfire carrying weapons and brewing tea. That they carried weapons with them would not have been considered out of the ordinary in the place I grew up, much less within the virtually lawless tribal territories outside the control of the Afghan authorities. Except that among them was a suspected member of the Taliban, given away by the targeted cell phone device in his pocket. As for the remaining individuals, to be armed, of military age, and sitting in the presence of an alleged enemy combatant was enough evidence to place them under suspicion as well. Despite having peacefully assembled, posing no threat, the fate of the now tea drinking men had all but been fulfilled. I could only look on as I sat by and watched through a computer monitor when a sudden, terrifying flurry of hellfire missiles came crashing down, splattering purple-colored crystal guts on the side of the morning mountain.

Since that time and to this day, I continue to recall several such scenes of graphic violence carried out from the cold comfort of a computer chair. Not a day goes by that I don't question the justification for my actions. By the rules of engagement, it may have been permissible for me to have helped to kill those men—whose language I did not speak, customs I did not understand, and crimes I could not identify—in the

gruesome manner that I did. Watch them die. But how could it be considered honorable of me to continuously have laid in wait for the next opportunity to kill unsuspecting persons, who, more often than not, are posing no danger to me or any other person at the time. Nevermind honorable, how could it be that any thinking person continued to believe that it was necessary for the protection of the United States of America to be in Afghanistan and killing people, not one of whom present was responsible for the September 11th attacks on our nation. Notwithstanding, in 2012, a full year after the demise of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, I was a part of killing misguided young men who were but mere children on the day of 9/11.

Nevertheless, in spite of my better instincts, I continued to follow orders and obey my command for fear of repercussion. Yet, all the while, becoming increasingly aware that the war had very little to do with preventing terror from coming into the United States and a lot more to do with protecting the profits of weapons manufacturers and so-called defense contractors. The evidence of this fact was laid bare all around me. In the longest or most technologically advanced war in American history, contract mercenaries outnumbered uniform wearing soldiers 2 to 1 and earned as much as 10 times their salary. Meanwhile, it did not matter whether it was, as I had seen, an Afghan farmer blown in half, yet miraculously conscious and pointlessly trying to scoop his insides off the ground, or whether it was an American flag-draped coffin lowered into Arlington National Cemetery to the sound of a 21-gun salute. Bang, bang, bang. Both served to justify the easy flow of capital at the cost of blood—theirs and ours. When I think about this I am grief-stricken and ashamed of myself for the things I've done to support it.

The most harrowing day of my life came months into my deployment to Afghanistan when a routine surveillance mission turned into disaster. For weeks we had been tracking the

movements of a ring of car bomb manufacturers living around Jalalabad. Car bombs directed at US bases had become an increasingly frequent and deadly problem that summer, so much effort was put into stopping them. It was a windy and clouded afternoon when one of the suspects had been discovered headed eastbound, driving at a high rate of speed. This alarmed my superiors who believe he might be attempting to escape across the border into Pakistan.

A drone strike was our only chance and already it began lining up to take the shot. But the less advanced predator drone found it difficult to see through clouds and compete against strong headwinds. The single payload MQ-1 failed to connect with its target, instead missing by a few meters. The vehicle, damaged, but still driveable, continued on ahead after narrowly avoiding destruction. Eventually, once the concern of another incoming missile subsided, the driver stopped, got out of the car, and checked himself as though he could not believe he was still alive. Out of the passenger side came a woman wearing an unmistakable burka. As astounding as it was to have just learned there had been a woman, possibly his wife, there with the man we intended to kill moments ago, I did not have the chance to see what happened next before the drone diverted its camera when she began frantically to pull out something from the back of the car.

A couple of days passed before I finally learned from a briefing by my commanding officer about what took place. There indeed had been the suspect's wife with him in the car. And in the back were their two young daughters, ages 5 and 3 years old. A cadre of Afghan soldiers were sent to investigate where the car had stopped the following day. It was there they found them placed in the dumpster nearby. The eldest was found dead due to unspecified wounds caused by shrapnel that pierced her body. Her younger sister was alive but severely dehydrated. As my commanding officer relayed this information to us she seemed to express disgust, not for the fact that we had

errantly fired on a man and his family, having killed one of his daughters; but for the suspected bomb maker having ordered his wife to dump the bodies of their daughters in the trash, so that the two of them could more quickly escape across the border. Now, whenever I encounter an individual who thinks that drone warfare is justified and reliably keeps America safe, I remember that time and ask myself how could I possibly continue to believe that I am a good person, deserving of my life and the right to pursue happiness.

One year later, at a farewell gathering for those of us who would soon be leaving military service, I sat alone, transfixed by the television, while others reminisced together. On television was breaking news of the president giving his first public remarks about the policy surrounding the use of drone technology in warfare. His remarks were made to reassure the public of reports scrutinizing the death of civilians in drone strikes and the targeting of American citizens. The president said that a high standard of "near certainty" needed to be met in order to ensure that no civilians were present. But from what I knew, of the instances where civilians plausibly could have been present, those killed were nearly always designated enemies killed in action unless proven otherwise. Nonetheless, I continued to heed his words as the president went on to explain how a drone could be used to eliminate someone who posed an "imminent threat" to the United States. Using the analogy of taking out a sniper, with his sights set on an unassuming crowd of people, the president likened the use of drones to prevent a would-be terrorist from carrying out his evil plot. But, as I understood it to be, the unassuming crowd had been those who lived in fear and the terror of drones in their skies and the sniper in this scenario had been me. I came to believe that the policy of drone assassination was being used to mislead the public that it keeps us safe, and when I finally left the military, still processing what I'd been a part of, I began to speak out, believing my participation in the drone program to

have been deeply wrong.

I dedicated myself to anti-war activism, and was asked to partake in a peace conference in Washington, DC late November, 2013. People had come together from around the world to share experiences about what it is like living in the age of drones. Fazil bin Ali Jaber had journeyed from Yemen to tell us of what happened to his brother Salem bin Ali Jaber and their cousin Waleed. Waleed had been a policeman and Salem was a well-respected firebrand Imam, known for giving sermons to young men about the path towards destruction should they choose to take up violent jihad.

One day in August 2012, local members of Al Qaeda traveling through Fazil's village in a car spotted Salem in the shade, pulled up towards him, and beckoned him to come over and speak to them. Not one to miss an opportunity to evangelize to the youth, Salem proceeded cautiously with Waleed by his side. Fazil and other villagers began looking on from afar. Farther still was an ever present reaper drone looking too.

As Fazil recounted what happened next, I felt myself transported back in time to where I had been on that day, 2012. Unbeknownst to Fazil and those of his village at the time was that they had not been the only watching Salem approach the jihadist in the car. From Afghanistan, I and everyone on duty paused their work to witness the carnage that was about to unfold. At the press of a button from thousands of miles away, two hellfire missiles screeched out of the sky, followed by two more. Showing no signs of remorse, I, and those around me, clapped and cheered triumphantly. In front of a speechless auditorium, Fazil wept.

About a week after the peace conference I received a lucrative job offer if I were to come back to work as a government contractor. I felt uneasy about the idea. Up to that point, my only plan post military separation had been to enroll in college to complete my degree. But the money I could make was

by far more than I had ever made before; in fact, it was more than any of my college-educated friends were making. So, after giving it careful consideration, I delayed going to school for a semester and took the job.

For a long time I was uncomfortable with myself over the thought of taking advantage of my military background to land a cushy desk job. During that time I was still processing what I had been through and I was starting to wonder if I was contributing again to the problem of money and war by accepting to return as a defense contractor. Worse was my growing apprehension that everyone around me was also taking part in a collective delusion and denial that was used to justify our exorbitant salaries, for comparatively easy labor. The thing I feared most at the time was the temptation not to question it.

Then it came to be that one day after work I stuck around to socialize with a pair of co-workers whose talented work I had come to greatly admire. They made me feel welcomed, and I was happy to have earned their approval. But then, to my dismay, our brand-new friendship took an unexpectedly dark turn. They elected that we should take a moment and view together some archived footage of past drone strikes. Such bonding ceremonies around a computer to watch so-called "war porn" had not been new to me. I partook in them all the time while deployed to Afghanistan. But on that day, years after the fact, my new friends gaped and sneered, just as my old one's had, at the sight of faceless men in the final moments of their lives. I sat by watching too; said nothing and felt my heart breaking into pieces.

Your Honor, the truest truism that I've come to understand about the nature of war is that war is trauma. I believe that any person either called-upon or coerced to participate in war against their fellow man is promised to be exposed to some form of trauma. In that way, no soldier blessed to have returned home from war does so uninjured. The crux of PTSD is

that it is a moral conundrum that afflicts invisible wounds on the psyche of a person made to burden the weight of experience after surviving a traumatic event. How PTSD manifests depends on the circumstances of the event. So how is the drone operator to process this? The victorious rifleman, unquestioningly remorseful, at least keeps his honor intact by having faced off against his enemy on the battlefield. The determined fighter pilot has the luxury of not having to witness the gruesome aftermath. But what possibly could I have done to cope with the undeniable cruelties that I perpetuated?

My conscience, once held at bay, came roaring back to life. At first, I tried to ignore it. Wishing instead that someone, better placed than I, should come along to take this cup from me. But this too was folly. Left to decide whether to act, I only could do that which I ought to do before God and my own conscience. The answer came to me, that to stop the cycle of violence, I ought to sacrifice my own life and not that of another person.

So, I contacted an investigative reporter, with whom I had had an established prior relationship, and told him that I had something the American people needed to know.

Respectfully,
Daniel Hale

Daniel Hale is an Airforce Veteran who served in Afghanistan as an intelligence analyst. He became disillusioned with his work on seeing numerous videos of innocent civilians torn to pieces by drone strikes based on the information he provided. After his discharge he provided information to a reporter with the Intercept on the technical configuration of the US global drone system along with the truth about the efficacy and accuracy of drone killing which formed the basis

of, a series of articles called “The Drone Papers”.

We Gotta Stand with Daniel Hall, Drone Warfare Truth-Teller

On Saturday, July 17, 2021, activists representing many organizations, including the Ban Killer Drones campaign and Peace Action New York State, held a press conference in support of the whistleblower Daniel Hale, who revealed information about the U.S. drone warfare program.

Daniel Hale served in the Air Force as an intelligence analyst. His task was to identify targets for the US drone assassination program. Troubled by what he did and saw, after leaving the Air Force in 2013, Hale provided documents about the drone program to the media. In 2019, four years after the documents were published, the Trump administration had him arrested and charged under the 1917 Espionage Act. He is being held in prison in Alexandria, VA, and will be sentenced to up to 10 years in prison on July 27, 2021.

Incomplete reports about US drone attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen alone found 16,901 people killed and 3,922 wounded. The use of drones is spreading. Drone attacks have been carried out by at least 12 nations, primarily by the USA, but also by other governments, including France, Israel, Turkey, and the UK.

“Some people call me a whistleblower or a patriot, but I was simply concerned with speaking the truth.” – Daniel Hale

Video by Wilton Vought

To learn more about Daniel Hale's case and how you can support him, go to standwithdanielhale.org.

Over 100 Groups Demand Biden End 'Unlawful' Drone Strikes Outside War Zones

by MEE Staff, published on Middle East Eye, June 30, 2021

More than 100 organisations have urged US President Biden to end “unlawful” drone strikes and the use of other lethal force outside of traditional combat zones.

In a letter released on Wednesday, 113 activist groups framed the issue as a matter of racial justice, and said drone strikes had “exacted an appalling toll on Muslim, Brown and Black communities in multiple parts of the world”.

“We appreciate your stated commitments to ending ‘forever wars,’ promoting racial justice, and centering human rights in US foreign policy,” the groups said in the letter.

“Disavowing and ending the lethal strikes program is both a human rights and racial justice imperative in meeting these commitments.

“Twenty years into a war-based approach that has undermined and violated fundamental rights, we urge you to abandon it and embrace an approach that advances our collective human security.”

Organised by the Human Rights and Security Coalition, the letter was co-signed by 77 human rights and anti-war groups in the United States and 36 groups based abroad, including in countries where the US has conducted the drone strikes in question, such as six groups from Yemen, three from Somalia, two from Pakistan and one from Libya.

“The US has been killing people for nearly 20 years in Yemen, but to this day it has not adequately investigated civilian deaths and injuries, or clearly recognized the severe harm caused to families and communities,”

Radhya al-Mutawakel, chair of the Yemen-based Mwatana Organization for Human Rights, said in a statement.

“The Biden administration should break with these damaging practices, and ensure thorough investigation and accountability for harms that have occurred,”

she continued.

Signatories on the letter to @POTUS calling for an end to the U.S. lethal strikes program come from wide array of perspectives and areas of focus. The wonderful and courageous @RAImutawakel of @MwatanaEn has this to say pic.twitter.com/2mtkI2jVeE

– Hina Shamsi (@HinaShamsi) June 30, 2021

The US's drone programme has long been the target of human

rights groups that have denounced the use of the armed uncrewed technology, particularly when used outside of traditional combat zones, such as in Afghanistan or Iraq.

On Sunday, the US carried out air strikes in Iraq and Syria on what it said were weapons depots. At least four members of Iran-backed groups were killed. While the US labelled the strikes as “*defensive*” in nature, both Iraqi and Syrian officials accused the US of violating their sovereignty.

‘Chart a new path forward’

The last major expansion of the US’s drone programme took place during the Obama administration when Biden was vice president. While Obama eventually tightened restrictions on the strikes during his second term, former President Trump loosened the rules when he was in office.

Shortly after taking office in January, Biden initiated a review of the use of armed drones and commando raids outside of standard war zones, imposing temporary restrictions. Such drone strikes now require additional high-level reviews to be approved, but have not been banned outright.

Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby in March told the New York Times that the restrictions were typical with a new administration, as it takes a “*broader review of national security issues across the board, including the legal and policy frameworks that govern these kinds of matters*”.

In their letter, the organisations acknowledged the review, calling it an “*opportunity to abandon this war-based approach and chart a new path forward that promotes and respects our collective human security*.”

As Biden has pledged to make progress in matters of social justice, the organisations also pointed to links between the US’s drone programme and issues of race.

“This program is a centerpiece of the United States’ forever wars and has exacted an appalling toll on Muslim, Brown and Black communities in multiple parts of the world,”

they wrote.

“It has caused lasting psychological trauma and deprived families of beloved members, as well as means of survival,”

they added.

“In the United States, this approach has contributed to further militarized and violent approaches to domestic policing; bias-based racial, ethnic and religious profiling in investigations, prosecutions and watchlisting; warrantless surveillance; and epidemic rates of addiction and suicide among veterans, among other harms. It is past time to change course and start repairing the damage done.”

***Featured Image:** *A military drone replica is displayed in front of the White House during a protest against drone strikes on 12 January 2019 in Washington, DC (AFP/File photo)*

Daniel Hale is a Hero, Not a Criminal

by **Chip Gibbons**, published on **The Jacobin**, April 10, 2021

Former intelligence analyst Daniel Hale is being prosecuted for blowing the whistle on America's drone program. It's the latest in the topsy-turvy world of national security whistleblowers, who reveal illegal and immoral conduct by the US military yet face prison time as if they committed the real crimes.

On Wednesday, March 31, Daniel Hale pled guilty to one count of violating the Espionage Act. On its face, the Espionage Act may sound like a law dealing with spies and saboteurs who injure the United States by furnishing military secrets to foreign enemies. But, from its inception, the act has been principally used to silence dissent. In recent decades, the law has become the government's go-to weapon against whistleblowers and journalists who challenge the US national security state.

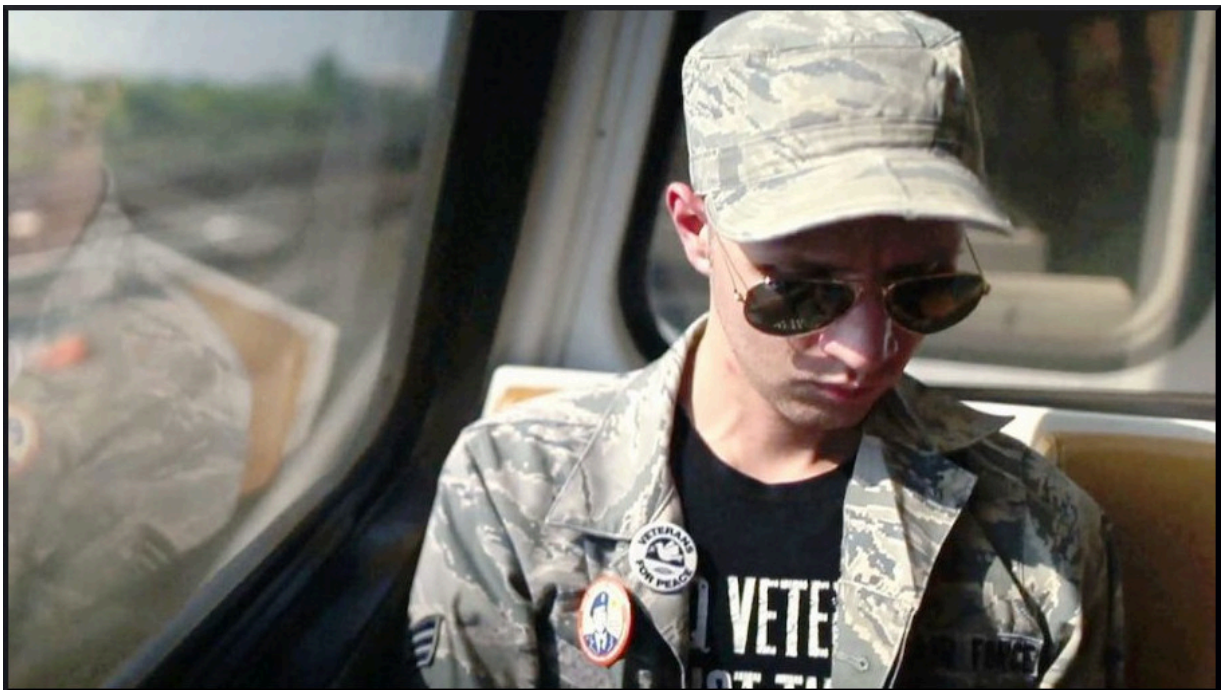
Hale conceded to giving documents about the US drone program to an investigative journalist (unnamed in court documents, but clearly Jeremy Scahill of the *Intercept*) and anonymously authoring a chapter in *The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program*. Far from a spy, Hale is a whistleblower – and a courageous one at that – whose actions have given us key insights into the unjust nature of US imperial power in the twenty-first century.

“There's No Way of Knowing” Who's Being Killed

From 2009 to 2013, Hale served in the US Air Force as an intelligence analyst. His motivations for enlisting were not based on an ideological affinity for US foreign policy. By Hale's own admission, he was deeply critical of it, but he was suffering from homelessness and had few other options. While in the Air Force, Hale was assigned to work with the National Security Agency (NSA) and was even stationed at Bagram air force base in Afghanistan as part of the Department of Defense's Joint Special Operations Task Force.

In this role as a signals analyst, Hale was involved in the identifying of targets for the US drone program. Hale would tell the filmmakers of the 2016 documentary ***National Bird*** that he was disturbed by *"the uncertainty if anyone I was involved in kill[ing] or captur[ing] was a civilian or not. There's no way of knowing."*

After leaving the military, Hale would work as a contractor with the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. He also began speaking out against US drone policy. In 2013, he met journalist Jeremy Scahill at a bookstore in Washington, DC, where Scahill was talking about his book *Dirty Wars: The World Is A Battlefield*. Later that year, Hale appeared on stage alongside Scahill at another book event.



Daniel Hale in the 2016 documentary *National Bird*.
(Independent Lens / PBS)

Hale shows up alongside a number of other drone whistleblowers in *National Bird*. Throughout the film, his politics are on full display. Hale wears a button in support of whistleblower Chelsea Manning, a Black Panther Party poster can be seen adorning his home, and he is pictured attending an antiwar protest wearing pins for the group Veterans for Peace.

During filming in 2014, Hale's home was raided by the FBI in connection to an Espionage Act investigation. The early fallout of the raid is depicted in the film, showing yet another pitfall national security whistleblowers face. Hale explained that he thought he was being targeted in part for being a former intelligence analyst now involved in political activism.

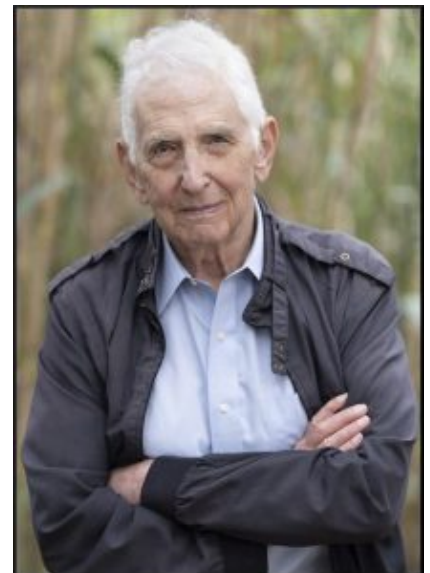
Exposing the Kill Chain

In 2015, one year after the search, the *Intercept* published an eight-part series titled "*The Drone Papers*," a groundbreaking exposé based on "*a cache of secret documents detailing the inner workings of the U.S. military's assassination program in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia.*"

"*The Drone Papers*" featured a number of startling revelations, depicting in full detail for the first time the "*kill chain*," the bureaucratic process by which targets are selected to be summarily executed. These targets are culled from secret terror watch lists, which include US citizens. Information about potential targets is transformed into "*baseball cards*" given to the president, who then has the option to sign what is essentially a death warrant. If the president signs off, the military has sixty days to carry out a lethal strike against the target.

Signals intelligence and metadata taken from phone intercepts played a heavy role in targeting. Yet the *Intercept's* reporting reveals that such methods were far from reliable and led to the killing of civilians. The source, now known to be Hale, was quoted as saying, "*It requires an enormous amount of faith in the technology that you're using. There's countless instances where I've come across intelligence that was faulty.*" And while these assassinations are often referred to by governments as "*targeted killings*," during one five-month period, more than 90 percent of those killed by US airstrikes were not the intended targets. Yet even when the US government killed unintended targets, it labeled them as "*enemies killed*

in action” unless proven otherwise. Then in 2019, a full five years after the initial FBI raid and four years after the publishing of *“The Drone Papers,”* the US Department of Justice indicted Hale on four counts of violating the Espionage Act and one count of theft of government property. Similar charges had historically been brought against Pentagon papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg and more recently Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden, and Reality Winner. **An Act to Quash Dissent** The Espionage Act has a loathsome history. Passed during World War I and used to criminalize opposition to the war, the act was most infamously used to jail socialist standard-bearer Eugene Debs, as well as members of the Socialist Party and Industrial Workers of the World.



Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon papers, in 2002. (Christopher Michel)

When Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo liberated the US government’s secret history of the Vietnam War, the Pentagon papers, the Nixon administration, seeking to make an example of leakers, charged them under the Espionage Act. Given the flagrant misconduct of the Nixon administration (Richard Nixon’s *“plumbers”* had burglarized Ellsberg’s psychiatrist hoping to find salacious evidence to use to discredit Ellsberg), the charges were dismissed.

When it came to journalists and their sources, the Espionage Act was occasionally invoked as a threat, but lay largely dormant until the twenty-first century. One exception was the Reagan-era prosecution of Samuel L. Morison for giving information to *Jane's Defense Weekly*. Yet the case was considered such an anomaly that Bill Clinton granted a full and unconditional pardon to Morison.

This changed with the Obama administration, which normalized the practice of indicting journalists' sources under the Espionage Act. Obama's Department of Justice chose to continue or, in some cases, reopen Bush-era cases against national security whistleblowers, bringing an unprecedented number of Espionage Act indictments. These included indictments against NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake and CIA whistleblower John Kiriakou.

Drake had raised concerns internally about NSA mass surveillance before later going to a *Baltimore Sun* reporter with unclassified information about waste, fraud, and abuse. The government dropped the Espionage Act charges against him on the eve of the trial as its case unraveled.

Kiriakou exposed CIA torture by bringing information to journalists, and was indicted under the Espionage Act. He pled guilty to violating the Intelligence Identities Protection Act, and was sentenced to thirty months in prison – making him, perversely, the only person to go to jail over CIA torture. While both of these cases had their origins in the Bush era, when Chelsea Manning exposed US war crimes and Edward Snowden revealed the NSA's illegal surveillance, they both were indicted by the Obama Department of Justice under the Espionage Act.

These were not the only victims of Obama's war on whistleblowers. By the end of his administration, Obama had indicted more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all previous administrations combined.

Trump picked up the baton Obama handed him, escalating the use of the Espionage Act and seeking longer and harsher sentences, including in the cases of FBI whistleblower Terry Albury and NSA whistleblower Reality Winner. Trump's Department of Justice also went a step beyond Obama, and, in the case of Australian journalist Julian Assange, indicted a publisher of truthful information for the first time. It was under the Trump presidency that Hale was at last indicted.

Prosecuted for Criticism

A whistleblower indicted under the Espionage Act has virtually zero chance at a fair defense. The law allows for no public interest defense. More disturbingly, whistleblowers are gagged from explaining their actions. Defense attorneys are barred from uttering the words "*whistleblower*" or "*First Amendment*" within earshot of the jury. Since all that matters for sustaining a conviction is that a defendant gave classified information to someone not entitled to receive it, that's all the jury is allowed to hear.

In the run-up to the potential trial, Hale's defense made a number of arguments as to why the indictment should be dismissed. Hale's attorney argued that the intelligence analyst turned antiwar activist was the victim of a prosecution both vindictive and selective. Government officials leak information about the US drone program all the time without prosecution. The difference is that they are feeding information to gullible reporters about the program's efficiency, whereas Hale's disclosures exposed the government's official claims as false.

The government decided to target Hale not because he leaked information on the drone program, which is a standard course of action in official Washington, but because he criticized the drone program. The defense urged the judge to order prosecutors to release its reasons for initiating the prosecution, and whether any initial decision not to prosecute

had been made and reversed. After all, this prosecution was brought half a decade after the investigation started and four years after the publication of *"The Drone Papers."* Such information could show whether the delayed prosecution was the result of a new administration's vindictiveness toward press freedom.

Additionally, Hale's attorneys brought First Amendment challenges to the indictment. They argued that the conduct central to the government's accusations against Hale, assisting a journalist in newsgathering, touched on core First Amendment protected freedoms. The defense pointed out that the Espionage Act was passed before the courts adopted their contemporary expansive interpretation of First Amendment press freedoms. They also argued that the record showed that Congress never intended the act to criminalize giving information to the public. While an appellate court had dealt with similar issues in the 1980s, the defense reasoned that as that case predated the government's widespread use of the Espionage Act to stifle newsgathering, the situation had changed. Hale was supported in this motion by a brief filed by Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.



Daniel Hale in the documentary National Bird. (Independent Lens / PBS)

The government made its own pretrial motions, urging a judge to preemptively bar the defense from making a wide range of arguments – for example, to challenge whether the documents were misclassified, arguing that such classification was the sole authority of the executive branch and therefore could not be challenged. They even went so far as to argue that whether the information was improperly classified was irrelevant, as an Espionage Act prosecution did not require the information to be properly classified, just classified. Classification, which postdates the Espionage Act, is supposed to be used to protect legitimate secrets, not conceal information that casts the government in a negative light. *“Overclassification,”* classifying information that should not be kept from the public, is a growing problem within the executive branch.

The government also moved to have the defense barred from mentioning the *“good motives”* of the defendant (i.e., his entire reasoning for making the disclosure) and argued that other government officials routinely leak information. The government even sought to bar the defense from arguing that an *“alternative perpetrator committed the charged crimes, absent some non-speculative evidence of that individual’s (a) connection to a particular reporter, and (b) knowledge of, or access to the documents at issue.”*

Faced with a limited ability to present any meaningful defense, Hale did what most whistleblowers indicted under the Espionage Act do after realizing how stacked the deck is against them: he pled guilty a week before the trial was to begin, pleading to one count – unlawful “retention and transmission of national defense information.” But the government has not dismissed the remaining four charges, instead merely asking for the trial to be postponed. This has raised concerns that the government could, if it feels the judge has given Hale too lenient a sentence, seek a trial on the remaining charges.

Official American Drone Policy Is Criminal

Speaking anonymously to Scahill at the time *"The Drone Papers"* were published, Hale explained why he chose to go to the American people with information its government had kept from them. *"This outrageous explosion of watch-listing – of monitoring people and racking and stacking them on lists, assigning them numbers, assigning them 'baseball cards,' assigning them death sentences without notice, on a worldwide battlefield – it was, from the very first instance, wrong."*

Drone strikes are a form of extrajudicial execution that is illegal under international law. They are a moral travesty. These assassinations are also part of larger foreign policy that is itself troubling. Enemies of whistleblowers often prattle on about the need to go through *"official channels."* But when the crime itself is official policy, what better check exists than the democratic process itself?

Yet from the Pentagon papers to *"The Drone Papers,"* the US government has worked to conceal the realities of its war-making from the US public, obfuscating our ability to use our democratic process to rebuke the government. This is a pernicious conspiracy against our ability to democratically decide our foreign policy. Presidents from both parties have helped to carry it out. Congress and the courts are both complicit.

These antidemocratic impulses of the national security state are what's actually harmful to our country – not a whistleblower who seeks to empower us to make democratic decisions about the crimes our government carries out in our name.

Hale's actions are both heroic and laudable. The fact that the government once again seeks to destroy a truth teller who exposed its crimes highlights the immorality of the system that Hale and others have exposed.

Please go to the website "Stand with Daniel Hale" to get

more information on Daniel's status and how you can help him.
[jb]

***Featured Image:** JANUARY 07: A U.S. Air Force MQ-1B Predator unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), carrying a Hellfire air-to-surface missile lands at a secret air base in the Persian Gulf region on January 7, 2016. The U.S. military and coalition forces use the base, located in an undisclosed location, to launch airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. (Photo by John Moore/Getty Images)

Chip Gibbons is a journalist who writes about civil liberties and social movements, both from a historical and a contemporary perspective. He is co-chair of the Metro DC Democratic Socialists of America Political Education Working Group.

Ban Killer Drones: International Campaign of Civil Disobedience Necessary (P2)

by **Brian Terrell**, published on **Covert Action**, May 10, 2021

A large campaign of civil disobedience is necessary to abolish one of the U.S. military's monstrous creations

The headline of the *Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan* on November 30, 2012, page one above the fold with my photo, read

"Terrell: American Drone Strikes Must Stop."

I was served well by this article explaining my opposition to killing by remotely controlled drones, as that morning I "surrendered" myself to the Federal Prison Camp in Yankton, South Dakota, to begin a six-month prison sentence for protesting at a drone base in Missouri earlier that year.

"While many Americans may think drone strikes are a safe way to conduct war and improve the nation's safety, one man will go to prison in Yankton today because of his belief that they are remotely committing crimes against humanity," the paper reported.

That first afternoon, when I walked into the prison's library, one inmate was reading that article aloud to the others, who broke into applause when they recognized me.



Protest outside Whiteman Air Force base, Missouri, April 7th, 2014. [Source: veteransforpeace.org]

It is a rare event for someone to go to prison for a federal misdemeanor like trespass and, in these days of mass incarceration and maximum-minimum sentencing, it is unusual for anyone to be incarcerated for so short a time as six months except in exchange for testifying against other accused defendants.

Having my crime and intention advertised to guards and prisoners alike saved me from the uncomfortable suspicion of being a snitch in prison. It also opened up many great discussions with my fellow inmates over those months.

The sentencing judge in this case had given me six weeks before presenting myself to the prison to put my affairs in order and I used that time traveling through Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, New York and Minnesota, speaking, protesting and organizing with other anti-drone activists.

A reporter from Missouri Public Radio called me during that time and requested an interview. She asked me a question I often hear, if I did not feel that I could do more for the cause by staying out of prison.

I responded by asking her if we would be having this interview if, instead of getting arrested and going to jail for it, I had simply called her station and expressed my concern that the United States was committing war crimes by remote control from Whiteman Air Force Base. This reporter admitted that no, there would not be any interest in talking with me if that were the case.



Terrell (left) protests drones with Colonel Ann Wright (right), at Whiteman Air Force Base in 2012. [Source: flickr.com]

The shift captain who checked me out when my sentence was completed six months later told me that, while he respected the strength of my conviction, he felt I had done my cause a disservice by going to prison.

I had irresponsibly squandered any credibility I might have had, he told me. Who will listen to a convict? Within the following six months, my platform from which to speak out about drone warfare expanded to churches, libraries, schools, universities, Quaker meeting houses and community organizations around the U.S., the United Kingdom and Germany, including Yale Divinity School, Harvard Law School and Queen's College in Birmingham, UK.

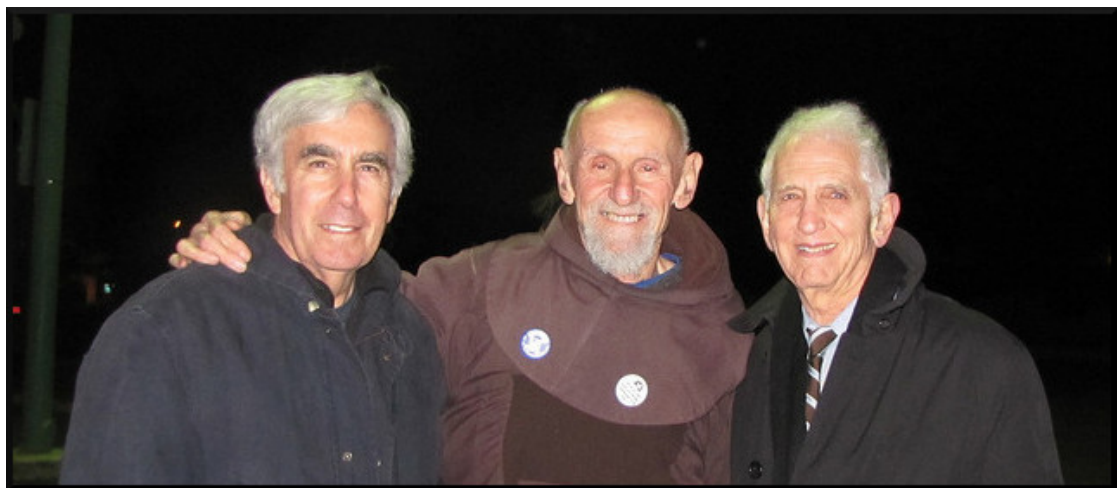
This was not the first time I had gone to jail protesting drones. In April 2009, about the time that President Obama made the Predator Drone the key to his "war on terror," I took part in the first protest of drone warfare anywhere, at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada. Creech was where the drone wars began and where the CIA runs its clandestine program of extrajudicial executions.



Protesters temporarily block traffic outside Creech Air Force Base in Nevada. [Source: commondreams.org]

Louie Vitale, a Franciscan priest and activist with the Nevada Desert Experience, first noticed mysterious pilotless/windowless planes circling the desert while he was protesting at the Nevada nuclear test site nearby.

As a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Cold War, Louie first understood and alerted us to their grim significance. From that beginning, I have been arrested at Creech at least nine times, each time spending anywhere from a few hours to four days in the Clark County Jail in Las Vegas, one of the most squalid and cruel lockups in the country.



Louis Vitale (center), with legendary whistleblower Dan Ellsberg (right), and David Krieger, after arrest

in 2012 at Vandenberg Air Force Base. [Source: oaklandvoices.us]

In February 2012, I was sentenced to ten days in the Jamestown Penitentiary for my part as one of the “*Hancock 38*.” The previous April we were arrested at the Syracuse, NY, civilian airport from where the New York Air National Guard flies weaponized drone missions.



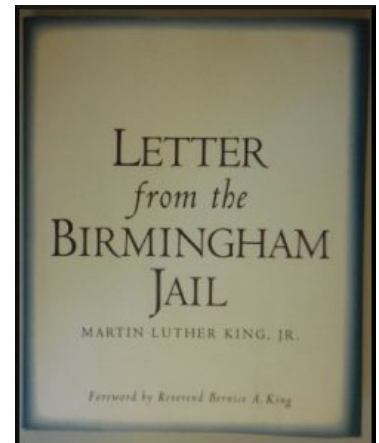
Volk Field [Source: volkfield.eng.af.mil]

Twice I joined the regular actions of the “*Occupy Beale*” group in California, resisting the Global Hawk surveillance drones flown from Beale Air Force Base. Each of those times, federal prosecutors dropped the charges.

I have also been arrested twice at Wisconsin’s Volk Field, where the National Guard trains soldiers to pilot the Shadow, a surveillance drone that is used for “target acquisition” for armed drones and attack helicopters and, in 2017, I was lodged quite comfortably in the Juneau County Jail for five days after refusing to pay a fine on a trespass charge.

Acts of civil resistance such as these are responses to grave crimes of the state and not crimes in themselves, even when arrest and prosecution seem the immediate outcomes. Such actions are often required, but are not the whole of a campaign for change, either. In resistance to killer drones, such tactics as petitions, billboards, teach-ins, marches, pickets have also been effectively used and more will be

needed as we go forward.



[Source:
amazon.com]

Martin Luther King, Jr., explained the necessity of direct action in his 1963 Letter from the Birmingham Jail:

"Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.

It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension."

I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth."

Nonviolent direct action is not the whole of a campaign for social betterment, but it is a necessary and indispensable component of any successful one.



The Late Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark addresses a gathering of about 50 defendants and supporters in front of the DeWitt Court House where the 38 Hancock drone protesters were on trial. [Source: mediasyracuse.com]

These actions in Nevada, California, Missouri, New York and Wisconsin and their ensuing courtroom dramas have raised the *"constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth"* in their communities at least to the extent that drone violence cannot be so easily ignored. We are responsible to build on these beginnings.

At the Syracuse trial of the *"Hancock 38,"* former United States Attorney General Ramsey Clark was permitted to testify on our behalf on the subject of international law.

Judge Gideon, after listening to Mr. Clark speak of the Nuremberg Principles and other laws as they apply to drone warfare at length, leaned over the bench and asked him,

"This is all interesting, but what is the enforcement mechanism? Who is responsible for enforcing international law?"

"They are," responded Mr. Clark, pointing to the 31

defendants, “*and so,*” he said to Judge Gideon, “*are you!*”



Activists Brian Terrell and Ghulam Hussein Ahmadi at the Border Free Center in Kabul, Afghanistan.
[Graffiti by Kabul Knight; photo by Hakim]

As a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a 25-year campaign that ended in December 2020, I was privileged to have the community support, the time and the means to join with these local cells of drone resistance around the U.S. and abroad.

Voices had also raised drone awareness by organizing several “peace walks” to drone bases, hundreds of miles on foot—from Chicago to a Michigan National Guard base in Kalamazoo; from Madison, Wisconsin, to Volk Field; from Rock Island, Illinois, to the Iowa Air National Guard drone command center in Des Moines—each time meeting with community groups and talking to hundreds of people along the way.



Peace march toward Volk Air National Guard Base in Wisconsin to voice concern with U.S. drone policy.
[Source: cnsblog.wordpress.com]

We itinerant Voices activists had a role in informing local anti-drone groups, in part because many of us have traveled to places under attack by armed drones, including Gaza, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon and Afghanistan. I have visited Afghanistan, the nation most subjected to U.S. drone attacks and with the most drone casualties, five times between 2010 and 2018 and, with my colleagues, we have met with and often been befriended by Afghans who have lost limbs and loved ones in drone strikes.

We know many others who, fearing drone violence, have fled their village homes with their families to live in squalid and overcrowded refugee camps.

Activists from Voices in the United Kingdom have been resisting the use of armed drones by the Royal Air Force, including nonviolent resistance at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire and at factories there producing drones for Israel's military.

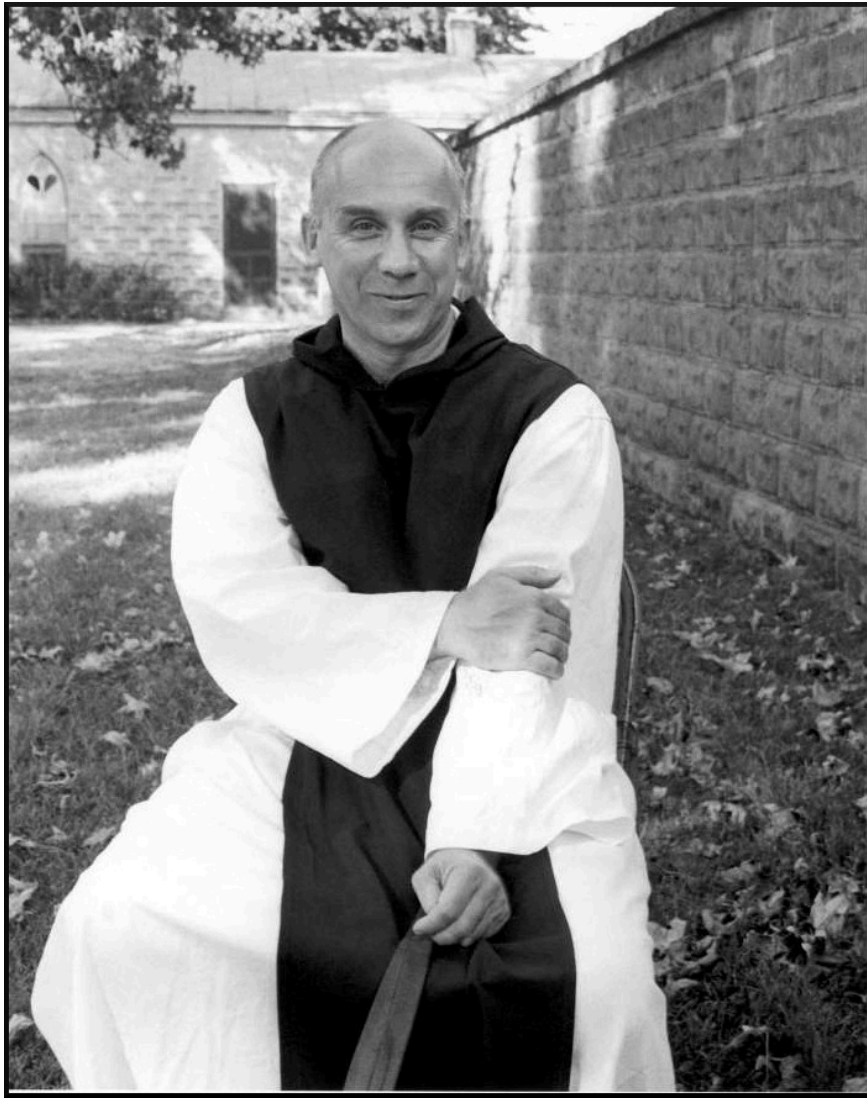
CODEPINK Women for Peace anti-drone activists likewise have

traveled to and established friendships in Pakistan, Palestine and other places targeted by weaponized drones.



CodePink founder Medea Benjamin protests drone war. [Source: codepink.org]

Banning weaponized drones is not an abstract “cause” but a real human obligation. Addressing resistance to the Vietnam War in 1966, Thomas Merton wrote, “It is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything.”



Thomas Merton [Source: uscatholic.org]

Not every anti-drone activist needs to visit war zones, just as not all of us need to go to prison, but some of us need to do both of these and it is the reality of those personal relationships that keeps our resistance from the abstractions that would otherwise suffocate it.

To learn more about the international campaign to ban killer drones, see bankillerdrones.org.

***Featured Image:** Brian Terrell (right), with Father Louie Vitale, at a 2009 anti-drone war protest at Creech Air Force Base, outside of Las Vegas, NV. [Source: Jeff Leys]

Ban Killer Drones: International Grassroots Movement to Ban Weaponized Drones Launched (P1)

by **Jack Gilroy**, published on **Covert Action**, May 10, 2021

An international grassroots movement to ban weaponized drones and military and police surveillance, entitled Ban Killer Drones, has been launched. Go to www.bankillerdrones.org to see the teamwork results of this excellent resource on the United States's not-so-secret assassinations around the world.



Protests outside Hancock Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, New York, in 2014.
[Source: Syracuse.com]

A group of long-time anti-drone war organizers, including Nick Mottern, Brian Terrell and Chelsea Faria, with support from two Nobel Peace Prize candidates, Kathy Kelly and David Swanson, worked to make this site the prime resource site to ban killer drones internationally.

Progressive readers will remember the years of struggle that produced the recent ban on nuclear weapons as well as the struggle that produced agreements on landmine and cluster

bombs.

I remember well where I was on October 1, 2014: I was handcuffed tighter than I had ever been, wiggling my fingers to keep my hands from going numb. I had been stuffed prostrate between the front and rear seat of an Onondaga Sheriff's Department car in Syracuse, New York.

DeWitt Town Court Judge Robert Jokl had just sent me on my way to the nearby Jamesville Correctional Facility to begin a three-month sentence for my participation in a die-in at the main gate of the NY Air National Guard 174th Attack Wing at Hancock Field killer drone base.



Die-in outside Hancock drone base in April 2013. [Source: space4peace.org]

Lying on the floor, squeezed between the seats, I asked the two deputies to give me room to sit. The deputy in the passenger seat called out: "You'll be at the jail in just 15 minutes or so, live with it."

I lived with it, serving 60 days of my 90-day sentence, with time reduced for "good behavior."

But I'm still mad as hell that my U.S. government continues to assassinate "suspected terrorists," expands its drone war and encourages other countries to do the same.

It is time to promote a treaty to ban weaponized and surveillance drones world-wide.



Gilroy protesting outside Hancock Air Force base on Earth day, April 22, 2021. [Photo courtesy of Heriberto Rodriguez]

The Predator

When I became aware of the drone protests at Hancock Field, I had written coming-of-age novels about conscientious objectors from WWII and the Vietnam war, but now war was being waged in my own back yard and few seemed to know about it.

The resisters at Hancock were, of course, trying to educate the public.

Sadly, even when some Americans did learn of assassinations operating out of United States drone bases, the acts of drone

terror seemed of little importance to them. After all, the terrorists were in foreign lands and we needed to “take them out” and not to worry about Hellfire missiles and bombs since they were in the Middle East, not in Syracuse.

Hancock’s 174th Attack Wing just did the electronic firing of weapons hovering over suspects thousands of miles away, seen of course by Attack Wing pilots with high-tech drone cameras via satellite.



[Source: 174attackwing.ang.af.mil]

I researched Predator and Reaper drones, spoke to folks who had been arrested for trespass at Hancock and was arrested a couple of times myself.

At the time, I was chair of the St. James Peace and Justice Committee in Johnson City, New York, 75 miles south of Syracuse. The headquarters of the Syracuse Diocese and the leader, Bishop William Cunningham, was hiking distance from the nearby weaponized drone base.

I had tried for more than two years with letters and phone calls to speak to Bishop Cunningham. My intent was to ask him his views on being so close to an institution that orchestrates assassinations, the 174th Attack Wing of the New York National Guard, just up the road a bit from his residence.

Persistence paid off. The bishop agreed to meet with our team of six resisters.

I asked Bishop Cunningham what he thought of the morality of the Hancock weaponized drone base. Bishop Cunningham said: "It's one way to keep our boys' boots off foreign soil. We don't need to be sending our young men off to war." Then, a bit later, he noted: "You do know that a lot of Catholics work at Hancock, don't you?"

We had assumed that to be so since we knew Bishop Cunningham had assigned one of his priests to minister to Hancock drone pilots.



Scene from The Predator: "I had hoped you'd go to one of the military academies." Jay Becker as Major Jennifer Golden, drone pilot, and Sarah Latham as her daughter, Ella. [Source: awaketodrones.blogspot.com]

Realizing that the Bishop's office was a dead end, I began to form a play in my mind of a young woman whose mother was a drone pilot at Creech. I decided to go with the title *The Predator* for obvious reasons.

In November 2013, the first staging of *The Predator* was done at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., with students from Syracuse University and the University of Scranton as actors. The event was the annual Ignatian Family Teach-In, the largest annual Catholic social justice conference in the United States.



Jack Gilroy discusses *The Predator*.

[Source: awaketodrones.blogspot.com]

Thankfully, I had a professional to assist: Aetna Thompson, a former member and singer with the satirical group in Washington called "The Capitol Steps."

An eye-catching prop was set up on campus, a facsimile of a Reaper drone designed and made by Nick Mottern, of Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, and coordinator of <https://www.knowdrones.com/>

Nick drove the disassembled mock drone from his home to Route 81 in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where he showed me how to assemble it and then covered the mock Hellfire missiles with

blankets—“just in case a State Trooper wonders about these rockets,” said Nick. The Reaper was my traveling mate in my old Volvo, the fuselage resting on my dashboard and the tail bumping my rear window.



Nick Mottern with mock drone. [Source: lehighvalleylive.com]

I drove south for our first gig at Georgetown University and then on to Ft. Benning, Georgia, where I stationed the Reaper mock-up at the entrance to the Columbus, Georgia, convention center, with a large sign tacked onto it announcing “*THE PREDATOR.*”

The Predator had legs, playing at many college campuses and church halls around the nation from around 2013 to 2017 with activists such as Ann Wright, former U.S. Army Colonel and U.S. diplomat and Kathy Kelly, Director of *Voices for Creative Nonviolence*, taking on roles.

The play is still available to download (and tweak to bring it up-to-date) for any group to use.

Did the reflection, the thinking of the outlandish immorality and cowardly killing of people with high-tech American terrorism lead me to write the play? Quite likely, it was a factor. But I felt that what I had done with the play was not enough, hence my arrest and jailing, noted above.

Going International

The work of Up State Drone Action to expose the international crimes of the 174th Attack Wing at Hancock killer drone base has been outstanding. From the first direct action at Hancock in 2011 to Earth Day 2021, a team of creative artists have used street theater at the very edge of the killer drone base on East Malloy Rd in Syracuse, NY.

Developing themes for each action, Dan Burgevin of Trumansburg, NY, Ed Kinane of Syracuse, John Amidon of Albany, Ellen Grady of Ithaca and many others have used a variety of scenes and song to illustrate the crimes going on inside the 174th Attack Wing.

For example, the Syracuse District Attorney's office liked to bring into court physical evidence (exhibits) to prove their case against the killer drone resisters. So, one action, called *Big Books* used huge facsimiles of anti-war books—8'x4' and blocked the gate to the Hancock weaponized drone base. The local court room didn't have room for the big books. Consequently, no big books were taken into court as exhibits by the Syracuse District Attorney's Office.



Protestors display replicas of books that point to evils of the drone war. [Source: Photos courtesy of Ellen Grady and MaryAnne Grady who designed the book replicas]



Bill Quigley
[Source:
ignatiansolidarity
.net]

Weaponized drones have nothing that is praiseworthy. Weaponized drones are unmanned weapons carriers used to assassinate people in foreign (for now) lands. The use of weaponized drones is immoral, illegal, racist (used mainly to

kill people of color) and pragmatically stupid.

No other nation does what the United States does frequently: assassinate with weaponized drones in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Libya. The United States is still the greatest purveyor of violence in the world and killer drones have become our deadly calling card.



Funeral for pine-nut farmer killed in drone strike in Nangarhar Province in Afghanistan in September 2019. [Source: [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com)]

Armed drones make bitter enemies around the world and create insecurity as they sow hate and vengeance.



Protest against U.S. drone strikes after drone attack in Multan, Pakistan, in 2012. [Source: foreignpolicy.com]

President Biden ended his inauguration speech with “May God bless America and God protect our troops.” That’s where we’re at: praising America and beseeching God to protect our troops. The arms industry and the religious arm of the military-industrial complex are smiling. It is clear that we must reach outside our borders and build an international consensus to end drone killing and drone surveillance.

I encourage readers to join the movement to establish an international ban on weaponized and surveillance drones. Go to www.bankillerdrones.org to initiate international action while pressuring Joe Biden and the war-prone Democrats to end weaponized and surveillance drones.

***Featured Image:** Anti-drone protest outside New York Air National Guard Base in April 2013. [Source: spaceforpeace.org]

Alice's Nightmare in Droneland- Live at Hancock Air Base

Statement Read at the Alice's Nightmare in Droneland Event:

from World Beyond War Blog, published October 29, 2020

We assemble here this morning to petition our government to end its use of killer MQ9 Reaper drones piloted from Hancock Air Force Base. Hancock is home to the 174th Attack Wing of the New York State National Guard. The 174th – together with all too many troops on other US bases across the planet – has been waging murderous war, in our name, against the people of the Islamic oil lands, against Iraqis, iranians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Syrians, Yemenis, Somalis, Libyans ...



We come from across New York State and Beyond, united as the Upstate Drone Action Coalition, a grassroots assembly of nonviolent activists. For years our local members have demonstrated here weekly, protesting Hancock's role in these crimes against humanity. A score of times for the past

decade, Upstate Drone action – under cover of the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution – has engaged in civil resistance at Hancock's very gate. Dozens of us have been arrested, have gone to trial, and some have endured prison. We persist because MQ9 drone attacks are evil. They are shameful, barbaric, illegal, racist. They are unjust, immoral, cowardly. They are islamophobic.... They help generate the planet's swelling ranks of refugees as human beings are displaced, maimed, killed, orphaned, widowed. Sadly, drone attacks numb our conscience.

Weaponized drone attacks are naked terrorism. What is 'terrorism', constantly invoked but rarely defined? Genuine terrorism is violence – or the threat of violence – perpetrated on civilians for political or economic gain. Our nation is the greatest purveyor of terrorism on our planet. U.S. terrorism spawns blowback. Last January's reaper drone assassination of Iran's General Qassim Suliemani, for example, risked extreme retaliation. Given the volatility of our era, such attacks may very well spark nuclear war. That is, global annihilation.

High-tech drone terrorism generates proliferation, with many nations racing – in defense – for mastery of the skies. Weaponized and surveillance drones have already come home to roost. Hancock's Reaper drones, menacingly, have even surveilled our weekly demonstrations.

Friends, look around you. See the imagery from that brilliant 19th century fable, Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland'. We call our 21st century tableau, 'Alice's Nightmare in Drone Land'. Chesire cat, depicted here tells us drone assassination is madness. Mad Hatter, knowing that the U.S. military is one of the world's major polluters and consumers of oil, urges us to stop destroying our climate.

"Alice herself cries out, 'Please don't kill me – I'm not a terrorist.' Let us open our hearts to the anguished cries of

every 'Alice', especially those mothers and children throughout the oil lands. And if, finally, we would open our ears to our fellow humans, we might also come to hear the screams – carried by wind, fire and flood – of our anguished and very resistant planet.



James Ricks of Ithaca and Harry Murray of Rochester, long time Drone protesters and veterans of civil resistance at Hancock Field

Drone Warfare Update from Upstate Drone Action:

U.S. expanding drone strikes from Somalia into Kenya

Camp Simba is on Manda Bay, Kenya's east coast, an airbase that the U.S. command has been using for over a decade. There, private Pentagon contractors have been flying surveillance flights throughout northern Africa and for drone attacks against Islamist militants in Somalia. The contractors also operate armed drones although they don't make targeting decisions. This allows the U.S. Africa Command to maintain the quasi-legal distinction that only uniform-wearing service members, who are lawful combatants, make the decisions as to who to target and kill.

Although Kenya's President has made public statements disavowing the Pentagon's use of its territory, it is not a passive host to American military operations. It has received more military aid than any country in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the world's top 5 recipients of U.S. counter-terrorism aid.

This use of private contractors is becoming more and more common. Aerex Aerospace is a major contractor at the Manda Bay airbase, having won \$44M in federal contracts in 2019. The Paris based news site Africa Intelligence reports its pilots operate Reaper drones and other intelligence-gathering aircraft throughout West Africa. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have relied on contractors because they give some degree of plausible deniability. Last year, the Pentagon spent \$370 billion, more than half the US military budget on contractors. (Brown and Boston Universities research)

There has been an expansion of lethal airstrikes with unaccounted civilian casualties in Somalia in the last three years. Human rights groups have reported 4-10 fold more civilian deaths from airstrikes than has the U.S. Africa Command. There is no reason to believe that lethal drone attacks in Kenya would be any more transparent.

The killing of Islamist militants based on suspicions and intelligence reports that later prove false has become the common practice in Somalia. The Trump administration has gone further, giving commanders expanded authority to order lethal drone strikes. As of late September, the military had not received executive approval to begin targeting in Kenya. But putting in place the infrastructure points toward yet another effort to expand an undeclared war in yet another country.

U.S. Arms Deal Integral part of UAE recognition of Israel

A previously secret part of the United Arab Emirates

diplomatic recognition of the state of Israel has become public in recent months. The Emiratis had been pushing for at least six years to buy F-35 fighter planes and Predator and Reaper drones. Israel had objected to the sales based on its reliance on a 50-year U.S. policy of maintaining the country's "qualitative military edge" over the neighboring Arab countries. Israel has a fleet of the stealth F-35 fighters and is a leading purveyor of advanced drone technology. Since 2017, Congress has prevented arms sales to the UAE and Saudi Arabia because of the thousands of civilians killed in their proxy war with Iran in Yemen.

Previously the U.S. government had held back on selling the Reaper drones, made by Lockheed Martin, because sales are banned by an arms control pact among 35 nations. In July, the Trump administration announced it would bypass the relevant parts of the agreement and issues sales licenses.

One thing that continues to amaze me is that even prize winning journalists whose articles I pulled this information from; never refer to Israel as a nuclear weapons power. This back-story of the U.S. obsession with Iran's nuclear weapons development is the pathetic public secrecy of our maintenance of nuclear superiority in the Middle East, not to mention everywhere else in the world.

Court Rules Against Trump drone killing policy

A U.S. district court has ordered the Trump administration to lift the total secrecy surrounding its rules for drone strikes and other killings abroad. This order comes as a result of Freedom of Information Act lawsuits filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and New York Times in December 2017.

The Trump administration's rules, known as the "Principles, Standards, and Procedures," are believed to loosen Obama-era policy restrictions aimed at limiting civilian casualties in areas "outside of active hostilities," such as in Yemen,

Somalia, among others. The district court rejected the administration's claim that it could not even confirm or deny whether the new rules exist. The Trump lethal force rules reportedly include lifting a requirement that a target must present a "continuing, imminent" threat to the United States, and permitting lethal strikes against a broader category of people, including those with no special skills or leadership roles. The Trump administration's rules also reportedly eliminate the high-level vetting required for each individual strike, instead requiring only "higher-level approval" of "country plans" that will be reviewed annually.

Brett Max Kaufman, senior staff attorney with the ACLU, had the following comment:

"Just like during the last administration, a court has decided that President Trump has stretched implausible claims of secrecy over the government's killing rules too far. The government should not only acknowledge these new rules exist, but make them public. Credible media and human rights groups have made clear that the Trump administration is killing more people in more places, with civilians and their communities bearing the brunt of tragic costs. We look forward to the government's response and to ensuring the administration is held accountable for this country's lethal force program abroad."

Trump Sued Over U.S. Sanctions on War Crimes Investigation

The International Criminal Court (ICC)is in the midst of investigating possible war crimes committed by the U.S. military in Afghanistan. In June the Trump administration issued executive orders sanctioning the Court. This has resulted in legal jeopardy for four law professors who have been providing legal advice and education to the ICC. The four, Diane Marie Amann of the University of Georgia School of Law, Milena Sterio of the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law,

Margaret deGuzman of Temple University's Beasley School of Law and Gabor Rona of the Cardozo School of Law, have filed a lawsuit claiming the order violates their First Amendment rights. The federal sanctions regime threatens them with as many as 20 years in prison.

U.S. Drone Strike in Syria Kills a Child as well as two Al Qaeda operatives

Airwars, the London-based airstrike monitoring group, reports that on October 15th the U.S. military carried out a drone strike killing two senior Al Qaeda operatives in Saeed, a town west of Idlib in northwest Syria. The strike killed a child and wounded multiple other civilians. The United Nations reported that two aid workers and their driver were injured, one of them critically, when the car they were traveling in was hit by shrapnel from a drone strike on another car in Idlib the same day. The U.S. Central Command has not reported on any civilian harmed in the killings. Neither Fox News nor the Washington Free Beacon, the only two news outlets to cover this strike, mentioned the suspected civilian casualties.

Shut Down Creech 2020

by **Tobey Blome**

Amazing week resisting killer drones at Shut Down Creech, culminating in a blockade and a 30 minute delay of commute traffic into the base early Friday morning, October 2nd, and no arrests.

Ground the Drones!

Toby, Maggie and all of earth's Creechers!

Press Release

Contacts: Toby Blomé, 510-501-5412;

Maggie

Huntington, (602) 459-5257

**Peaceful Anti-drone protestors block entrance to U.S. Assassin Drone Base;
Military traffic unable to enter base for half an hour.**

A group of 15 peaceful protesters from Nevada, California, and Arizona converged for a weeklong protest at Creech Air Force Base to oppose the remote-controlled killing that takes place in the desert just north of Las Vegas. Organized by CODEPINK and Veterans For Peace, the bi-annual protest known as "Shut Down Creech" was different due to the concerns and constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, and especially because many of the regular activists are elders, and are at higher risk of complications and death. The event included both social distancing and mask wearing at the twice daily commute hour protests at the base. Precautions were also followed during their entire stay at their base camp, "Camp Justice," down the road from the base. In spite of the risks, these activists were compelled to participate and take a strong and determined stance against the illegal and inhumane remote killing by U.S. drones that occurs daily at the Nevada air base.

Most of the activists were reluctant to engage in civil disobedience, as they often do, because of the risk of COVID-exposure during a possible jail detention. However, 2 activists, Maggie Huntington from Flagstaff, Arizona, and Toby Blomé from El Cerrito, California ultimately participated in a "soft blockade" to impede commute traffic into the base for as long as they possibly could up until the point that the time limit expired that the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police gave to warn blockaders of impending arrest. Because the activists unexpectedly chose Friday morning for their blockade of resistance, the military and law enforcement officers were caught off guard. In the early morning rush hour traffic, the women, aged 65 and 76 years old, stretched a large banner, **"Stop Droning Afghanistan, 19 years ENOUGH!"** across the entrance road into the killer drone base. They also placed in the road several small "coffins," with names of other countries that are targets by U.S. drones, to impede traffic. They then read into a megaphone the names and ages of some of

the victims of U.S. drone attacks memorialized on small pink paper drones. The activists were able to remove themselves from the road in time to avoid arrest and simultaneously communicate a clear message of objection and noncompliance to the intolerable U.S. practice of remote killing, where hundreds of children have already died as "collateral damage."

Due to the element of surprise, the alternative northerly gate, a mile up the roadway from the commuter gate, was closed, and it took significant time to open and receive traffic. As a result military traffic was backed up all the way down highway 95, to the site of the blockade. Dozens, if not hundreds, of cars were delayed into the base, for about a half hour. Activists considered the action a very successful achievement toward their goal: To shut down Creech Air Force Base for as long as possible to halt the criminal activity taking place. www.ShutDownCreech.blogspot.com

"I'm motivated to participate in this resistance, with the hope that we will teach the soldiers that they must take control of and understand the consequences of their actions," said Maggie Huntington, one of the blockaders. According to one Chinese Proverb, "To know and not to act is not to know."

Other Shut Down Creech demonstrations during the weeklong anti-drone protest included: a solemn *"funeral procession"* along the highway with black clothing, white masks and small coffins; LED light board letters in the dark of the early morning, declaring: *"NO DRONES"*;



–Observation...without judgement...is the Highest Form.....of Human Intelligence

–Drone Attacks are.....COWARDLY, BARBARIC, RACIST, WRONG, SHAMEFUL, UNJUST, IMMORAL.....

Other commute vigil themes included:

–War is Not Green/End War for Climate Justice (The U.S. Military is the #1 Global User of Fossil Fuel)

–WAR IS A LIE: PRESIDENTS LIE, CONGRESS LIES, GENERALS LIE, CIA LIES, etc.

Why We Persist: Activists Have Protested US Drone Base

for Over a Decade

by **Ed Kinane**, published on **Truthout.org**, December 22, 2019

“All human beings possess the basic right under international law to engage in non-violent civil resistance activities for the purpose of preventing, impeding, or terminating the ongoing commission of [international crime].” – International law expert Francis Boyle

Nonviolent civil resistance against international crime is about effectiveness *and* persistence. Or as Dorothy Day might say, *faithfulness*. We sow seeds – awakening the cogs in the machine of imperial crime *and* informing those who, with their federal taxes, help finance that crime.

But it's about *us* – getting off our duffs and out of our comfort zones. Here in Syracuse, New York, we call it “street heat” – baby steps toward resistance, dipping our toes into the waters of risk and sacrifice. The “streets,” where Chris Hedges and Noam Chomsky keep telling us that, if things on this planet are going to turn around, *that's* where it has to happen.

In the fall of 2003 in a series of front-page stories, the Syracuse *Post-Standard* announce

d with satisfaction that our local Hancock Field Air National Guard Base was becoming the hub for the wondrous weaponized MQ9 Reaper drone. For several days over that Thanksgiving weekend, several of us protested and fasted in downtown Syracuse.

Since then, for the past decade, immediately outside Hancock, with over 170 more protests, activists from what soon became the Upstate Drone Action Coalition have sought to expose the ensuing Reaper drone terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Allies from the Syracuse Peace Council, Veterans For Peace, Voices for Creative Nonviolence and the Catholic Worker have

provided the campaign's life blood.

The Campaign

For 45 minutes every first and third Tuesday of the month, a handful of us locals demonstrate across from Hancock's main gate. Yes, these are brief demos, but some of us are differently abled and some are "octos" – activists over 80 years old. We face the vehicles going in and out of the base at afternoon shift change. This is also rush hour along East Molloy Road. Our signs and banners urge, "STOP THE KILLING" and "ABOLISH WEAPONIZED DRONES" and "DRONES FLY, CHILDREN DIE."

A second, more dramatic element of the campaign is our episodic (roughly twice a year) "tableaux" and street theater blocking the driveway into that main gate. Both approaches – the first with little risk of arrest and the second with inevitable arrests – seek to poke the conscience of the 174th New York Air National Guard's Attack Wing operating out of Hancock.

Here at our very doorstep, 174th personnel pilot remotely controlled Reaper robots laden with bombs and "precision" Hellfire missiles. Via rapid satellite relay, from within the riskless anonymity of Hancock's fortified base, those warriors and their chain of command spew death and destruction.

Maybe our repeated poking will afflict their consciences. To the extent that they have eyes to see, the pilots get to witness firsthand on-screen the carnage they perpetrate – scattered and smoldering body parts. Such exposure just may induce "moral injury," the psychic wound caused by betraying one's core values. We hope that, despite being offered hefty bonuses, these technicians will refuse to re-enlist. The fewer enlistments, the less death.

Their targets and their civilian victims are mostly uncounted,

undefended, unidentified Muslims inhabiting oil-rich lands. Here is Islamophobia with a vengeance. Multitudes are terrorized. If they survive, many become internal or external refugees. And why wouldn't some also become the imperium's die-hard foes? As the Pentagon surely counts on, the inevitable blowback generates further mayhem. Such mutually reinforcing (but extremely asymmetrical) mayhems reliably produce the high-tech contracts Lockheed Martin and its ilk thrive on.

It's usually mid-morning when two of our Upstate Drone Action members and a videographer approach Hancock's main gate, unannounced, to hand-deliver a letter through the barbed wire fence to the armed gate-keepers. Addressed to the 174th Attack Wing, the letter urges personnel to uphold their oath to protect the U.S. Constitution. We cite Article Six of that Constitution, which mandates that international treaties and international law are the "Supreme Law of the Land." Such law, including the legally binding UN Charter, supersedes federal, state and local law. It stipulates that such military aggression amounts to a war crime.

Simultaneously, down the base driveway, our flash mob sets up banners and dramatic props. These, along with our bodies – vertical or horizontal, sometimes clad in hijab or draped in bloody shrouds – block any incoming traffic.

Within minutes, soldiers pop out from behind cement barriers to divert incoming vehicles to Hancock's other entrances. An officer marches out to inform us – with profound understatement – that we aren't wanted on base property. Working hand in glove with the military, the town, county and state constabularies arrive, red lights flashing. These, helpfully, draw the public's gaze to our event. The cops schmooze with the soldiers, taking an hour or two to assemble their forces. Then, having dutifully warned us for the third time to leave, they handcuff us while soldiers confiscate our props. Our supporters across the road chant and sing.

Surveillance cameras and police and military videographers record the scene.

At our tableaux and die-ins, up to 38 of us at a time have been arrested. We are driven to cells in area police stations. Despite these many forays onto federal property, military police never arrest us and we're never charged with federal crimes. Invariably we keep getting two contradictory state charges: trespass (private property) and disorderly conduct (for public places). Both charges are "violations," a minor matter. Violations for others generally lead to quick release with an appearance ticket. But we get special handling: strip searches along with the protracted tedium of being booked. After some hours, we are arraigned. In the late evening, we may be released with dates for the DeWitt Town night court. Often there's bail, not because we are flight risks (we relish our days in court) but as a kind of pre-trial chastisement. Some of us refuse to post bail.

Sometimes, arbitrarily, misdemeanor charges are piled on: obstruction of government administration (OGA) or contempt of court for allegedly defying Orders of Protection (OOP) forbidding us to return to the base. Those stay-away orders "protect" the base commander who has alleged that we physically threaten him. This fiction parallels the perennial propaganda trope that migrants from afar – in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Afghanistan – threaten the U.S. The local judges impose OOPs on dozens of us. Bizarrely re-purposed, OOP wording is derived from child or spouse abuse boilerplate.

Such OOPs have been enforced unevenly. Several years ago, Mary Anne Grady Flores, a grandmother from Ithaca, New York, got a yearlong sentence for allegedly violating her OOP. Her sole crime: photographing protesters (who subsequently were all acquitted) from Molloy Road's shoulder. After a few months in Jamesville Penitentiary, Mary Anne won release pending appeal. If eventually her appeal fails, she'll be re-incarcerated.

We've long lost track of the numbers, but well over 100 of our cases have been tried before either of the two elected part-time DeWitt Town justices, Robert Jokl Jr. or David Gideon. Those are mostly bench trials, in which a judge determines verdict and sentence; or, if involving misdemeanors, a six-person jury renders the verdict. In this court, not shy about doling out maximum sentences, juries are forbidden to hear what the max can be.

On the brink of a trial, the prosecutor may suddenly drop the misdemeanor charge, cleverly disrupting our defense prep. Jury trials in DeWitt are only occasional, since these burden the court calendar and the town budget, while providing us the opportunity to testify about drone atrocity. In an arrest-happy time and place, law enforcement and the court prop up the ambient militarism, particularly where a community embraces its military base as a "job-provider." Conveniently for stoking public buy-in, multitudes of redundant military installations are spread widely over congressional districts across the land.

Central New York is one of the nation's major drone technology incubators, housing a branch of Lockheed Martin and SRC Inc., a defense research company. This gravy train seems to mesmerize local mainstream media, the Chamber of Commerce, nearby citadels of higher learning, and those of all political stripes dependent on government jobs and grants: co-optation broad and deep. Even liberal activists compartmentalized in their domestic issues shrink from acknowledging Hancock's war crimes.

When we point out to police that war crimes occur just yards from where we're being arrested, we hear, "It's not our jurisdiction." The court dismisses out of hand our International Law and Necessity defenses. Nor, of course, does it acknowledge that Hancock, in violation of the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, occupies Haudenosaunee Indigenous land. Note the historical continuity: most Reaper victims are themselves

tribal or Indigenous people of color inhabiting formerly colonized but now nominally sovereign lands such as Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. All areas, it happens, the U.S. has yet to even officially declare war upon. Those Hellfire missiles – talk about trespass!

The disorderly conduct charge is bogus; as the base's surveillance cameras attest, we treat everyone with respect and don't resist arrest. (Before each demonstration, every participant signs a pledge of nonviolence.) Nor do our blockades discommode the public. The OGA charge is likewise bogus: trial witnesses, citing "security," refuse to reveal details of Hancock's illegal and clandestine operations, which we call out and allegedly disrupt.

At trial, we defend ourselves *pro se* or with *pro bono* attorneys. Our lead attorney travels well over 300 miles from Long Island at his own expense. On the witness stand, we speak to what drone strikes do to human flesh, psyches and souls, and thus why we risk prison opposing brutality. We note that we don't do civil disobedience – we do civil *resistance*. We don't disobey law; we seek to *enforce* law – both U.S. and international. We observe the Nuremberg injunction that those aware of war crimes must try to expose and impede them – or else we would be complicit ourselves.

For the DeWitt court, international law is an alien concept. In many of this rogue nation's law schools, international law apparently isn't taught. U.S. superpower exceptionalism prevails. The Constitution's First Amendment – which validates our right to petition the government for redress of grievances – is also alien.

In the early days, seeking to deter continued civil resistance, we were each customarily fined the maximum amount of \$375, and some of us were also sentenced to 15 days in jail. In a further attempt to deter, the DeWitt judges – in apparent cahoots with the base – eventually conjured up those

aforementioned Orders of Protection. Fortunately, suburban juries can't always be counted on to find scrupulously nonviolent defendants guilty. Sometimes they find us not guilty on one or more counts, or the court feels compelled to dismiss a lackadaisically prosecuted charge.

Nowadays, the DeWitt court seems to be kicking the judicial can down the road. As I write in December 2019, our July 2018, June 2019 and September 2019 arrests have yet to be assigned trial dates. In DeWitt, New York, the notion that "justice delayed is justice denied" is quaint. This past summer, one judge, without explanation or apology, simply didn't show up for a motions hearing or to set a trial date. More recently, one evening's judge told us, after we'd all traveled to a mandated court hearing, that our case wasn't on that evening's docket. Can it be that the validity of our cause is now dawning on the judges, making it hard to know what to do with us?

Reaper terror, first under Bush, increasingly under Obama, then far more under Trump, keeps escalating. We may never know if our efforts somehow slow the pace. But we do know that here in our backyard, if we don't stand up and speak out against war crimes, it's unlikely anyone else will. And we know that if no one speaks out, the Pentagon will keep operating as if it has a popular mandate to keep up the killing.

So we persist.

For video footage of Hancock actions, see upstatedronaction.org. For updates on our arrests and trials, see nukeresister.org. To glimpse the horror of weaponized drones, see the Stanford and NYU Law Schools' joint 2012 report, "Living Under Drones."

***Featured Image:** *An MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft flies by during a training mission at Creech Air Force Base on November 17, 2015, in Indian Springs, Nevada. ~Isaac Brekken /*

Getty Images

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Ed Kinane is a cofounder of the Upstate Drone Action Coalition. With Voices in the Wilderness in Baghdad in 2003, Kinane survived “Shock and Awe.” He has been jailed numerous times for civil resistance at Hancock and elsewhere. Reach him at edkinane340@gmail.com.

Drones Fly, Children Die

by Judith Bello

Hancock Air National Guard Base was one of the first domestic drone bases to come on line. The base is located in a pleasant suburb of Syracuse New York, along side the International Airport. The 174th Attack Wing at Hancock is tasked with flying Reaper Drone missions over Afghanistan and other places on the far side of the world that they are unwilling to name. They also fly Drones berthed locally over the Adirondacks to the East and Lake Ontario to the West. I saw one 100 miles west of there heading for Rochester International Airport one day. Hancock is the domestic center for training Reaper pilots and mechanics. The men of the 174th are proud of their work, which is important to the imperial U.S. international policing mission. At least in some cases, the human consequences of their work is not entirely clear to these men.

About a week ago, a small group of protesters went out to Hancock Air National Guard Base to exercise their civil rights and petition the government for redress of grievances. They

believe that the use of hunter, killer Drones to attack people in countries we are not at war with, mostly countries that do not have the international status or military capacity to defend their people, is morally wrong and a violation of international consensus in general and international law. Further, they believe that the use of Drones piloted from the neighborhoods where we live and work endangers us in the long run.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

International law protects the rights of civilians. It also says that it is fair to retaliate against an attacker in the location where the attack is coming from. That would be Hancock, or more generally, Syracuse New York. Drone attacks rarely target anyone who is an immediate threat to the United States or countries at war with the U.S. They protect U.S. 'Interests' abroad. Drones attack people in their own lands, often in countries that are destabilized by competing foreign interests. Drone bombs take out anyone who happens to be in the same area as the target. Though the targeting is technically precise, it is often inaccurate due to misunderstanding of the actions of innocent people on the ground.

But 'Why protest military Drones now?' The United States is currently at war with Afghanistan (after nearly 18 years), has a significant presence in Syria and Iraq and Yemen where it is engaged in proxy wars, and is threatening Venezuela and Iran very directly. The Russiagate enthusiasts and China-phobes are making plans for a 'limited' nuclear war and developing tools for a war in space that could isolate the earth from the rest of the universe for a very long time. Meanwhile, President Trump withdrew the United States from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia, which limits the development of medium range nuclear missiles. In early June, Russian President Vladimir Putin complained that the U.S. has

been unwilling to engage in negotiations which must be completed by 2021 to to renew the New START treaty which is the only remaining strategic nuclear arms control agreement in place between the United States and the Russian Federation. We are entering the world of Dr. Strangelove. The Atomic clock is a few seconds from midnight and global nuclear annihilation is now a serious risk.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

So, why devote ourselves to protesting military Drones? Well, I'll get to the concerns that mobilized us in a minute. But first, the universe provided a perfect example of the significance of Drones in the above context a day or two before our protest. The Iranians shot down a U.S. surveillance drone over their coastal waters. It was a Global Hawk, large and expensive, but unarmed. Trump and the 'B' team (Bolton, BiBi, Bin Zayad, Bin Salman) immediately went into action, preparing a retaliatory strike. The Pentagon worked out a plan and initiated it. Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, choking off oil shipping in the region, and asserted that they would defend their sovereignty to a very bitter end. But, according President Trump, he called off the attack, 10 minutes before the strike because he was told there would be 150 casualties. If a U.S. attack were to trigger a larger war there might be tens of thousands of casualties, including U.S. casualties.

Instead he called for new sanctions against individuals including sanctions against the Javad Zarif, a long time diplomat and peace maker who went to school in the U.S. and is very friendly to Americans, and Supreme Leader Khamenei, who does not have any assets outside of Iran. Since Iran is a relatively large country with an identity and history going back several millenia, and is very closely affiliated with Russia and China, starting a war over a piece of machinery would indeed have been a pretty stupid thing to do. But they

didn't, this time.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

There were a number of factors that motivated the protesters to go out to Hancock in June, and that wasn't one of them. It was a total surprise. We haven't heard much about Drones lately, until the Iranian shoot-down, but not because they weren't in play. Military Drones are ubiquitous messengers of U.S. aggression.. A friend who did several tours of duty in Iraq pointed out that they provided protection for the soldiers on the ground. Of course, we don't have any soldiers on the ground in Libya, and supposedly, our soldiers in Iraq and Syria are keeping the peace, not engaged in open warfare. What soldiers are they protecting in the battlefields where U.S. soldiers are not supposed to be present on the ground?

Over the last couple of years, the Africom has built several large military bases across Africa to support a massive expansion of the Reaper drone fleet there. Currently, Somalia is a primary target. Somalia became a failed state the last time the U.S. tried to democratize them. Armed Drones fly routinely over Yemen, where they target al Qaeda, Islamists who are allied, with our proxy, Saudi Arabia. They fly over Iraq and Iran. Reapers continue to be the primary air force in Afghanistan. When you hear a report that 3 or 5, or 10 or 50 people were killed in an airstrike there, most likely it was a Reaper Drone strike. A 500 lb Paveway bomb will kill a lot of people in a wedding tent or at a town meeting or in a multi-family household, a compound, as they like to call it. Of course, this is just the way people live in Afghanistan, at least people who can afford a decent home.

Drones are deeply embedded in every U.S. warzone and area of military interest. Drones are used to seek out individuals where they live and work. Maybe they are bad people, or maybe they just appear to be the bad people. And usually, they are

in the company of their families and friends, engaged in the normal activities of their community when the Drone catches up with them. Targeted assassinations often rely on a cellphone to identify the target, so don't borrow anyone's phone there, don't walk in the store where a targeted individual is shopping. One man told me he sleeps in the mountains to protect his family. Heaven forbid someone should think he is home one night and take them all out while they are sleeping.

Signature Strikes, which target people who appear to be 'acting like militants', are still approved. So, men gathering for a meeting or emerging from their workplace, people praying after lunch along the roadside, schoolboys in a bus, people at a wedding firing their guns into the air, all might seem like good targets. The possibilities are endless when drone pilots who have never left the U.S. and never met anyone from Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, or wherever, and knows nothing about Islam. But at least our guys are safe over here.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

Drones violate international law. You have probably heard that before. What does it mean to say that military Drone strikes violate International Law. It means that they tear the very fabric of global society. It means that those who fly them do not feel constrained by the boundaries of nations or the rules of war. Drone warfare dehumanizes targets who are far away, and at least on the surface, appear to be more 'enemies' in a video game than humans living in society. The United States, having first launched a campaign of armed drones as weapons of war, is a role model for others coming on line, Russia, China and Iran. Israel pioneered Drones over the last decades, and also contempt for international law and the rights of other nations. Drones are consistently used against presumed 'fighters' who are not on a battlefield. Whatever war plans are in the making, Drones will be a central part of their

enactment.

Now 'unarmed' Reapers are patrolling our borders. With the growing hysteria over illegal immigration, how long will they remain unarmed? ICE agents routinely check out the passengers on buses with dogs, and dust the baggage at train stations along the Canadian border for explosives. Drones have been used to target a couple of high profile criminals in this country. China and Russia, and even Iran now have their own military Drones. Armed Drones are not useful for dogfights, but they are very useful for policing. Just as in the interior of our cities, suspects are routinely killed to avoid risk and confusion, around the world suspects and anyone near them are routinely annihilated by hellfire missiles and Paveway bombs.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

Is this the world we want to live in? Members of Upstate (NY) Drone Action say no. And they put their bodies on the line to say it. If you want change, you have to do something about it. It is difficult to be heard these days, but its important to make the effort. If more people were to protest regularly in the name of peace and justice, it would become easier to be heard. Lots of people don't like U.S. wars and interventions. But if you don't come forward and put something on the line then your voice will be silent. Voting is a good idea, but so few candidates oppose the wars that most people don't have access to them. Donald Trump, of all people, ran as an advocate for withdrawing from the many ongoing U.S. wars around the world, but he seems to have forgotten now that he is in office. He has doubled down on military Drone use around the world. Obama ran as a peace candidate but he too presided over a huge increase in lethal Drone activity, the destruction of Libya and Syria and Honduras (to name a few), and the beginning of the Saudi war to occupy Yemen.

So, on the appointed day, we met at 6:45 with the items for

our tableau, in the pouring rain and decided to go ahead anyway. Drones Fly; Children Die. War is an ugly and dark theme, why not roll it out in the rain. People set up the Tableau blocking the ingress lane of the road leading to the main gate at Hancock Field, and went to the Guard Shack to read the guards our complaint and ask them to forward it to the Colonel who is responsible for the Base. A soldier in a rain slicker immediately went into the main road to direct traffic to a different gate, and a lone policeman arrived. Sherri began chanting. She called out the names of some of the dead children killed in drone strikes. We joined her in a lament. Sherri and Peg chanted, sang and wailed through the entire event in the pouring rain, a couple of hours until the police took those practicing civil resistance to a holding pen in Onondaga County Jail.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

And all the while it rained and rained and rained. The rain poured down like tears from a universe where people's lives are a matter of consequence.

The clips embedded in this article were taken from footage filmed by Heriberto Rodriguez, who somehow captured beautiful clean footage in the pouring rain, including nice cameos of activists stating their reasons for protesting at the base and images of the vivid tableau in which they embedded themselves and the supporters across the street who held signs and chanted.

On June 20th 2019, 8 protesters outside the front gate of Hancock were arrested and charged with Trespassing and Disorderly Conduct, both violations, and Obstructing Governmental Action, a misdemeanor. They were Ann Tiffany, Ed Kinane, Dan Burgevin, Julianne Oldfield, Les Billips, Ray

Kraemer, Mark Scibilia-Carver and Tom Joyce.