

Confronting Senator Schumer on his Position on Drones

Report to Upstate Coalition to Ground Drones and End the Wars on a Visit to Charles Schumer's Peekskill Office – February 10, 2015

On the afternoon of February 10, after three snow postponements, Kwame Madden and I met in the Peekskill, NY office of Senator Charles Schumer with Cody Peluso, his Regional Director, and Brandon Graham, a staff assistant.

In addition to providing Cody and Brandon with the ample background information from the Coalition, we gave them a letter to Senator Schumer that listed campaign contributions totaling \$639,300 that he has received between 2009 and 2014 from makers of military drones and from financial firms that are invested in military drone makers. The letter asked the senator to:

“...explain why you accepted these contributions and specifically what you think these firms hope to gain from their support.”

Before getting to Cody's responses to this letter (attached), here is a brief summary of our visit.

The meeting was very cordial. We talked exclusively with Cody; Brandon listened. Cody seemed to take a genuine interest in what we were saying and evinced considerable concern at what we were telling him about the impact of drone attacks on those under surveillance and attack.

He said that in presenting our information to his superiors, one question that would come up is whether it is not true that drones have been effective in countering terrorism. I

responded that if one measures success by whether drone attacks have reduced violence and created a more stable, healthy environment for people in and outside drone attack zones, one can say only that drone war has been a total failure.

Another point he said is also raised is that drones protect U.S. soldiers and save their lives. I told him that the air force is having a hard time keeping drone pilots and that if they felt they were saving lives of their comrades it is hard to believe they would be dropping out of drone piloting. I noted the April 2014 report from the Government Accountability Office describing the problem of drone pilot dropout.

With respect to the campaign finance letter, Cody first said that the companies listed all have a major economic role in New York and hence gave contributions. I responded that if they have this role, it is obvious they are important to the state, and there is no need to contribute. Further, I pointed out that one should not be voting on issues of war and peace and at the same time accepting money from weapons makers and banks deeply invested in weapons makers.

Kwame asked whether or not Senator Schumer has "certain standards on who you take money from." I said this was a key point and one that is faced by religious and other institutions when they decide what investment they will make.

Cody agreed that "the optics of it (the contributions) are an issue."

He said that Senator Schumer had never, in any conversation that he, Cody, had been privy to, said something was being done in relation to a campaign contribution.

I explained to Cody that we definitely wanted a response to the questions in the letter, quoted above, and he said he would let that be known to his bosses.

We intend to follow up on this.

At the end of the meeting, I asked Cody what Senator Schumer's position on drone attacks is.

"He does think they (drones) have a place in our military," he said, and that the senator thinks of President Obama's drone attacks that "some are beneficial and helpful."

He said that the senator had also been an advocate for drone training being done at Hancock air base.

Nevertheless, he said he would carry our message forward.

We provided a great deal more information and perspective than what is noted here, but these are the key points.

ATTACHMENT A

February 5, 2015
Senator Charles Schumer
1 Park Place, Suite 100
Peekskill, New York 10566

Dear Senator Schumer:

In reviewing information provided in OpenSecrets.org, it appears that between 2009 and 2014 you received campaign contributions from military drone manufacturers and financial institutions invested in military drone manufacture, as follows:

Military Drone Manufacture – \$143,900.

- Lockheed \$60,000
- Harris \$45,300
- Carlyle \$38,100

Financial Institutions Invested in Military Drone Manufacture

– \$495,400.

- Lazard \$184,200
- Citi \$98,900
- BlackRock \$77,600
- Goldman \$74,300
- JP Morgan \$60,400

We would appreciate it if you would explain why you accepted these contributions and specifically what you think these firms hope to gain from their support.

Sincerely,

Nick Mottern Kwame Madden

KnowDrones.com

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Hastings on Hudson, NY 10706

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NOTE TO ORGANIZERS – (The following was not included in Schumer letter.)

In addition to the listing of campaign contributions found at Open Secrets.org, the information in the letter on financial institutions invested in military drone makers is derived from DontBankontheBomb.com

Don't Bank on the Bomb is a very valuable, highly detailed report on which financial institutions are invested in firms that are producing nuclear weapons. Many of these weapons firms, like Honeywell, Lockheed, Boeing and Raytheon are also involved in work on military drones.

Financial institutions will obviously move to protect and enhance their investments, so those with weapons investments are obviously critical players in war politics, and in this

case, drone war politics.

Lack of transparency in the CIA and military drone killings

You Never Die Twice: Lack of Transparency in the CIA and Military Drone Killings

By *Mickie Lynn*,

Republished from her blog in the *Albany Times Union*, *Waging Peace*.

This week *Women Against War* and members of several other Capital District peace groups joined in a *Statewide* lobbying initiative of our two Senators, Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer, after having to re-schedule our Monday appointments due to the foot of snow and more that fell on the area. Women Against War had already held a [long, productive lobbying meeting on the topic of Weaponized Drones](#) with David Connors, Senator Gillibrand's Regional Director, in October. So we decided to just deliver the excellent packet prepared by the *Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars* to their office.



At the courthouse in DeWitt, NY, May 16, 2014, Ed Kinane, Teresa B. Grady & Mary Anne Grady Flores

But we took the opportunity to set up a lobbying session with Senator Schumer's Regional Director, Steve Mann. In both cases we asked that they pass our information on to the legislative aides in Washington, D.C. It was nice to be part of an effort that visited regional offices all over the state, each delegation creating their own materials to add to the Upstate Drone Coalition's printouts and talking points.



Drones Kill Civilians, banner and signs at Legislative Office Building, photo by Mabel Leon

If you want to read more about our visits to our two Senators, I've written [a detailed report](#) with links to the packets that we distributed, and our local lobbying materials as well. The links to each of the materials gathered by the Upstate Drone Coalition can be read on [their website](#). Since they have been demonstrating for 4 years now and appearing in DeWitt town court where some have been tried and sentenced they have heard many stories about drone killings of civilians that have moved and inspired them. You can read their ["Talking Points"](#) to find out more.



Hancock Air Base Drone Protest, April 2011

In this particular article I wanted to share two documents from their packet that moved me the most and made me *rededicate* my efforts to stop the use of kill lists, secret drone programs, and such indiscriminate targeting as classifying all men of a certain age range as "military targets" or targeting people for death because of their location or behavior – as seen by drone sensors, or the dropping of bombs and missiles on homes, fields, gardens, and other infrastructure where civilians are most likely to be

killed while present but unseen or unidentified.



You Never Die Twice: MULTIPLE KILLS IN THE US DRONE PROGRAM”, report by human rights charity, Reprieve.

US drone strikes kill 28 unknown people for every intended target, new Reprieve report reveals

US drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan have killed as many as 1,147 unknown people in failed attempts to kill 41 named individuals, a [report](#) by human rights charity Reprieve has found. The report looks at deaths resulting from US drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan between November 2002 and November 2014. It identifies 41 men who appeared to have been killed multiple times – drawing into question the Obama administration’s repeated claims that the covert drone program is ‘precise.’ While the US drone program is shrouded in secrecy, security sources regularly brief the media on the names of those suspected militants targeted or killed in the strikes. Frequently, those individuals are reported to have been targeted or killed on multiple occasions. Reprieve’s assessment is the first to provide an estimate of the number of people – including in some cases children – who are killed each time the US apparently attempts to assassinate a ‘high value target.’ Due to the US

Government's refusal to publish any information relating to the program, or the 'Kill List' said to determine its targets, the analysis is limited to existing, publicly-available data from media reports and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. [...]

And in the case of high value targets who receive the most publicity and the greatest numbers of attempt to kill them without trials the rate of civilian deaths is even higher for every strike.

*Jennifer Gibson, Staff Attorney at Reprieve who compiled the report, said: "These 'high value targets' appear to be doing the impossible – dying not once, not twice, but as many as six times. At the same time, hundreds of unknown men, women and children are also caught in the crosshairs. President Obama continues to insist drone strikes are 'precise', but when targeting one person instead kills **as many as 128 others**, there's only one conclusion that can be drawn – there's nothing targeted about the US drone program."*

This is a very detailed report, footnoted and citing many examples. Some names may be familiar to you from the media. You can read the [complete report here](#). The second article is a letter from an Afghan man whose brother-in-law, and four friends were killed in a US drone strike. His name is Raz Mohammad. I've heard his story before because his letter asking for the drone attacks to stop is one that several nonviolent drone resisters have cited as their inspiration to act.



Raz Soeaks out on the use of weaponized drones in Afghanistan

Afghan Peace Volunteer Says Drones Bury Beautiful Lives: Raz Mohammad Interviewed by Kathy Kelly by Hakim and the Afghan Peace Volunteers

January 10, 2013

Raz Mohammad: Salam 'aleikum. I am Raz Mohammad. I'm from Maidan Wardak province and I'm Pashtun.

You can read his interview by Kathy Kelly and see a video [at this website](#) Here's the [text of his letter](#) that so moved and inspired me and many other anti-drone activists:

On Friday the 30th of May, 2008, my brother-in-law was killed by a drone along with four of his friends. My brother-in-law was a student and he was innocent. Accountability from the US Military for this incident was non-existent. The incident created a situation which was beyond imagination. It affected the minds of my sister and all members of my family. When my

nephew was 5 years old, he asked his mother "Where is father?" My sister replied "He was killed by a computer." These negative effects persist on all of us to this day. I am worried for my family and for the people of my village. I request that the United States courts protect my family and my village. Signed by Raz Mohammad, translated by Dr.Hakim in Afghanistan, written 11/25/13,

Drones and Discrimination: Kick the Habit

Kathy Kelly talks about her recent trial, the action she was convicted for, and her pending jail sentence. She talks about drone victims and the victims she is sure to meet when she arrives at whatever prison she is told to report to.

On December 10, International Human Rights Day, federal Magistrate Matt Whitworth sentenced me to three months in prison for having crossed the line at a military base that wages drone warfare. The punishment for our attempt to speak on behalf of trapped and desperate people, abroad, will be an opportunity to speak with people trapped by prisons and impoverishment here in the U.S.

Our trial was based on a trespass charge incurred on June 1, 2014. Georgia Walker and I were immediately arrested when we stepped onto Missouri's Whiteman Air Force where pilots fly weaponized drones over Afghanistan and other countries. We carried a loaf of bread and a letter for Brig Gen. Glen D. Van Herck. In court, we testified that we hadn't acted with criminal intent but had, rather, exercised our First Amendment right (and responsibility) to assemble peaceably for redress

of grievance.

A group of Afghan friends had entrusted me with a simple message, their grievance, which they couldn't personally deliver: please stop killing us.

I knew that people I've lived with, striving to end wars even as their communities were bombed by drone aircraft, would understand the symbolism of asking to break bread with the base commander. Judge Whitworth said he understood that we oppose war, but he could recommend over 100 better ways to make our point that wouldn't be breaking the law.

The prosecution recommended the maximum six month sentence. "Ms. Kelly needs to be rehabilitated," said an earnest young military lawyer. The judge paged through a four page summary of past convictions and agreed that I hadn't yet learned not to break the law.

What I've learned from past experiences in prison is that the criminal justice system uses prison as a weapon against defendants who often have next to no resources to defend themselves. A prosecutor can threaten a defendant with an onerously long prison sentence along with heavy fines if the defendant doesn't agree to plea bargain.

In his article "Why Innocent People Plead Guilty," Jed S. Rakoff draws attention to the institution of plea bargaining which now ensures that less than 3% of federal cases go to trial at all. "Of the 2.2 million U.S. people now in prison," Rakoff writes, "well over 2 million are there as a result of plea bargains dictated by the government's prosecutors, who effectively dictate the sentence as well."

"In 2012, the average sentence for federal narcotics defendants who entered into any kind of plea bargain was five years and four months," Rakoff writes, "while the average sentence for defendants who went to trial was sixteen years."

It's one thing to read about the shameful racism and discrimination of the U.S. criminal justice system. It's quite another to sit next to a woman who is facing ten or more years in prison, isolated from children she has not held in years, and to learn from her about the circumstances that led to her imprisonment.

Many women prisoners, unable to find decent jobs in the regular economy, turn to the underground economy. Distant relatives of mine knew plenty about such an economy several generations ago. They couldn't get work, as Irish immigrants, and so they got into the bootlegging business when alcohol was prohibited. But no one sent them to prison for 10 years if they were caught.

Women prisoners may feel waves of guilt, remorse, defiance, and despair. In spite of facing extremely harsh punishment, harsh emotions, and traumatic isolation, most of the women I've met in prison have shown extraordinary strength of character. When I was in Pekin Prison, we would routinely see young men, shackled and handcuffed, shuffling off of the bus to spend their first day in their medium-high security prison next door. The median sentence there was 27 years. We knew they'd be old men, many of them grandfathers, by the time they walked out again.

The U.S. is the undisputed world leader in incarceration, as it is the world leader in military dominance. Only one in 28 of drone victims are the intended, guilty or innocent, targets. One third of women in prison worldwide, are, at this moment, in U.S. prisons. The crimes that most threaten the safety and livelihood of people in the U.S. of course remain the crimes of the powerful, of the corporations that taint our skies with carbon and acid rainfall, peddle weapons around an already suffering globe, shut down factories and whole economies in pursuit of quick wealth, and send our young people to war.

Chief Executive Officers of major corporations that produce products inimical to human survival will most likely never be charged much less convicted of any crime. I don't want to see them jailed. I do want to see them rehabilitated

Each time I've left a U.S. prison, I've felt as though I was leaving the scene of a crime. When I return to the U.S. from sites of our war making, abroad, I feel the same way. Emerging back into the regular world seems tantamount to accepting a contract, pledging to forget the punishments we visit on impoverished people. I'm invited to forget about the people still trapped inside nightmare worlds we have made for them.

On January 23, 2015, when I report to whichever prison the Bureau of Prisons selects, I'll have a short time to reconnect with the reality endured by incarcerated people. It's not the rehabilitation the prosecutor and judge had in mind, but it will help me be a more empathic and mindful abolitionist, intent on ending all wars. Kathy Kelly (Kathy@vcnv.org) coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org)

Drone damage causes pilot's to quit

Drone damage causes pilot's to quit:

"Killing during the day and going home at night"

Nick Mottern on "In the Now on RT, January 21, 2015

Stop U.S. drone warfare now



An unmanned U.S. Predator drone flies over Kandahar Air Field, southern Afghanistan, on a moon-lit night.(Photo: AP)

I just spent two months as a prisoner in Jamesville Penitentiary.

I was jailed for my involvement in an April 28, 2013, solemn funeral procession at Hancock Air Force drone base in Syracuse. I joined 30 others to carry the message to “stop the killing.” Hancock’s 174th Attack Wing of the New York State National Guard flies missiles and drops bombs via satellite from drones thousands of miles from Syracuse. The targets are suspected “terrorists” somewhere in the Middle East.

Stanford University Law School’s International Human Rights Conflict Resolution Clinic and New York University Law School’s Global Justice Clinic, working independently with The Bureau for Independent Journalism, spent years collecting data on U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan. The findings are grim. In their report titled “Living Under Drones,” only 2 percent of the killings have been confirmed “suspected terrorists” by the law schools’ study.

Thousands have been killed, thousands wounded – body parts

scattered in cities and countryside by our killer drones. There are no estimates of psychological damage to millions who live under drones 24/7. The killings by American drone missiles may be the best recruitment tool for more Middle East terrorists.

My "crime" was being a nonviolent messenger outside the main gate to Hancock. I was convicted of trespass and obstructing government administration. I was handcuffed and sent to Jamesville Penitentiary in Syracuse. As the oldest prisoner at Jamesville at 79, I was also the only political prisoner – a prisoner of conscience.

Before my sentence, I was offered a plea bargain: Plead guilty and have all charges dropped, or go to trial and face a year and 15 days in Jamesville Penitentiary. As a former high school teacher of Participation in Government classes, I could not say I was guilty of a crime for practicing my First Amendment rights of assembly, speech, press and religion.

Thankfully, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio did not support arresting Wall Street demonstrators during the U.N. Climate Summit in September of this year. "I think the First Amendment is a little more important than traffic," de Blasio said when asked about disruptions caused by the Wall Street demonstration. "The right of people to make their voices heard, regardless of their views, is a fundamental American value, and we'll protect that value."

It should be noted that those of us arrested did not block traffic at Hancock Drone base on April 28, 2013.

The refusal of the DeWitt town court in East Syracuse to recognize First Amendment rights of assembly is akin to the medieval act of killing the messenger of bad news. The insistence of the DeWitt court to collaborate with the military to stop nonviolent protest near the Hancock Attack Wing is in violation of the U.S. Constitution. The DeWitt

court order of protection to stay away from the assassination base begs the question: Is there collusion between the DeWitt court and the military to suppress constitutional rights?

Gilroy is a lifetime anti-war activist who has been working with the [Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars](#). He is a resident of Endwell, NY.