Exposing Drone Terrorism: Remarks at the 2015 Left Forum

Exposing Drone Terrorism: Remarks at the 2015 Left Forum
by Ed Kinane. Republished from Truthout.org Speakout

I'll begin by noting that most terrorism *has not* been perpetrated by Islamic-identified people. In fact, despite the relentless deluge of publicity to the contrary, Islamic-identified people commit only a fraction of the world's terrorism.

Most terrorism is large scale. In the 20th and 21st centuries most terrorism is high tech and airborne…whether over Guernica or Dresden or Nagasaki or Hiroshima or Tokyo or Laos or Viet Nam or Baghdad or Gaza. Airborne violence primarily murders civilians. Airborne terror is shooting fish in a barrel.

In the 21st century weaponized drones are the favored instrument of this airborne terrorism. Drones are the darling of the planet's major terrorist power, the CIA/Pentagon. As yet only two nations – one Christian-identified and one Jewish-identified – deploy weaponized drones and they do so massively.

That may be obvious to many in this room, but it's a reality monolithically obscured in US corporate media. Hence it's a reality totally *not* grasped by mainstream USA.

Drone terror is not just about the maiming and killing of civilians or about assassinations and extrajudicial executions. Nor the violation of national sovereignty nor about a superpower's contempt for international law. Nor about the deceit, clandestinity or suppression of domestic civil rights that accompany drone terror. Drone terror is also about

the enduring *fear* drones generate – whether in Waziristan or rural Afghanistan or Yemen or wherever. A fear that leads *hundreds of thousands* to flee their homes and villages….except in Gaza, where, trapped in their open-air prison, few can flee. People in Gaza, living daily under the gaze of Israeli drones, endure years of trembling and despair.

The politicians and mainstream media pull off the Big Lie about who the terrorists really are when they incessantly invoke the terrorist boogieman and virtually never define the word. They never come clean about what terrorism really is. They never explain that terrorism isn't a function one's color of skin or of one's cultural identity, but that *terrorism is none other than violence – or the threat of violence – directed at civilians for political or military ends.*

The politicians and mainstream media would convince us that terrorism is exclusively what others do, never what US forces do. These media pimps ignore the intent and effects of such US high tech terror devices as Cruise missiles or Agent Orange or landmines or depleted uranium or napalm or white phosphorus or cluster bombs…or the US nuclear arsenal.

The media don't tell us that drones, with their Hellfire missiles and 500 lb. bombs, dismember and incinerate human beings with far less "precision" than any ISIS beheading.

I mention *fear*. The corollary of fear is *cowardice*. Terrorism, especially airborne terrorism, is cowardly. In those demolished cities and besieged regions I cited above, there's little or no capacity to shoot back. The killer/victim ratio is obscene. For example, in the Gaza invasions, the kill ratio is about 100 to one. Gaza is the barrel; Gazans are the fish.

Drone operators, whether in Israel or in the US, are totally safe; totally riskless, doing their dirty work tens or hundreds or thousands of miles away from those they incinerate or dismember. The drone crew – godlike – stands outside the

barrel, killing in comfort, in ergonomic chairs, on shift, during precise hours, a daily commute from their spouses and kids, a few miles along paved roads from their TVs, their refrigerators, their air conditioning, their plumbing.

In Central New York where I hail from, the Hancock killer drone base hosts the 174th *Attack* Wing of the New York State National Guard. At Hancock, the drone operators and their chain of command are enclosed by a high barbed wire fence and heavily armed guards. As if such force protection isn't enough, the base commanders have somehow gotten both DeWitt Town judges to issue *Orders of Protection* against scrupulously nonviolent anti-drone activists. Such Orders of Protection forbid us to even approach those fences or those guards.

The irony is that these Orders of Protection – a legal device designed to protect abused spouses and kids – facilitate the slaughter of innocents in Afghanistan. Those Orders choke our First Amendment right to petition the Government for a redress of our grievance re the war crime done in our name and with our tax dollars.

Over the years in various articles and in various forums, my mantra has been: *Drones are tactically clever, but strategically stupid*. Typically I go on to discuss the blowback that weaponized drones generate. And I note the proliferation thanks, in part, to US and Israeli export of drones. I point out that the day may not be far off when drone terror is also used against domestic foes of the US power structure, the likely victims being minorities or dissidents or legal demonstrators or simply those out of favor with the reigning party or security apparatus. Drones, like chickens, are coming home to roost. (The White House ought not to forget that one day it too may become a drone target. That prospect might keep any reluctant president doing the industrial/military complex's bidding.)

But now I realize that my mantra, Drones are tactically

clever, but strategically stupid, is over-simple. It fails to tell us who suffers and who gains from strategic stupidity. For those currently monopolizing drone weaponry, drones are a kind of miracle…at least in the short term.

When it deploys weaponized drones, alienating whole swaths of humanity, the Pentagon surely loses any battle for "hearts and minds." But there's method to the madness. All that drone-inspired hatred toward the US serves a useful purpose: like US arms sales and arms transfers to volatile regions, drones keep the pot boiling. This keeping-the-pot-boiling disaster capitalism is gravy for corporations seeking overseas resources, cheaper labor or international markets. And especially so for those – like Bechtel or Boeing or Lockheed or General Atomics – who buy Congress and suck up lucrative Pentagon contracts. For many, drones are exciting and miraculous. After all, drones promise to promote US capitalist world dominance.

And to do so on the cheap.

Now, our panel this morning seeks to generate discussion on how we might expose and oppose drone terrorism. What I bring to the conversation is several years' experience of resistance to one specific weaponized drone base just outside my hometown, Syracuse, New York, but Hancock is only one of several US drone bases attracting persistent anti-drone resistance. Others include Beale in California, Creech in Nevada and Whiteman in Missouri. And now there's the campaign against the US drone signal relay station at Ramstein AFB, Germany, heating up.

Hancock, a former F-16 airbase, now is an MQ9 Reaper hub. Since 2010, Hancock has been operating the Reaper hunter/killer drone over Afghanistan 24/7. We suspect Hancock targets other countries as well.

In 2009, our grassroots group, the Upstate Drone Action Coalition – also sometimes called Ground the Drones and End the Wars – began demonstrating there at least twice a month. Our campaign – inspired by Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King and by Fr. Roy Bourgeois of School of the Americas Watch – uses an ensemble of tactics. These include actions at the base that risk, and thus far have always resulted in, arrest. As of 2015, we've had over 160 arrests.

Upstate Drone Action perpetrates a range of direct actions right outside Hancock's main gate. Beforehand all participants read out loud together and sign our Nonviolent Pledge. So far there have been ten or a dozen such actions with ensuing trials. On one occasion, 31 of us were arrested, and on another, 38.

With each action we go to the gate and try to deliver to the chain of command our People's Indictment of Hancock War Crimes – co-authored by former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark. More recently we have also tried to submit to the guards a People's Order of Protection on behalf of Afghan children.

Our documents being rebuffed by the guards, we then "die-in" – sometimes wrapped in bloody shrouds – blocking the base entrance. In October 2012, we blocked all three Hancock entrances. Last March 19, to block the entrance, we used several seven-foot high, three-dimensional cardboard "big books" (including the UN Charter; the NYU/Stanford report, *Living Under Drones*; and Jeremy Scahill's *Dirty Wars*).

Uniformed DeWitt Town police, Onondaga County sheriffs and New York State troopers arrive and arrest us. No soldiers perform arrests, nor have there been any federal charges. So far there's been no rough stuff.

We're charged in the DeWitt Town court variously with trespass, disturbing the peace, and obstructing government administration. Those allegedly violating their Order of

Protection are charged with contempt of court – a misdemeanor allowing for a jury trial, of which we have had several. But mostly, after long delays, we have bench trials.Often we go *pro se*, i.e. defend ourselves, the better to speak from our hearts and put drone terrorism itself on trial.

The two DeWitt Town judges – defying international law and the Sixth Article of the US Constitution making such law the supreme law of the land – are determined to deter us from further actions at Hancock. So, for recidivists – some of us having been arrested five and six times – the judges multiply hoops and escalate penalties. At arraignments, the judges have imposed $10,000 bail on a couple of our people – a punitive absurdity since none of us miss an opportunity to return to court.

Mostly we've been fined $375 – the max for trespass – which some us refuse to pay and instead divert to a peace group in Afghanistan. Some of us are sentenced to 15 days in the local slammer. One 79 year-old spent two months in prison; one grandmother, now out on appeal, got a year's sentence – which, happily, led to a spate of publicity…at least overseas and in movement media.

We call our trials "court witness"; we call doing time "prison witness." Our actions aren't civil disobedience, but rather *civil resistance* – because we're not disobeying law, but trying to enforce law. As we see it, doing time is a trifle compared to the price paid by those living – and dying – under drones.

Copyright, Truthout. May not be reprinted without permission.