

A Forgotten Drone Victim And the U.S. War on Indigenous Peoples

by Judith Bello, 2017



Malik Jalal in Islamabad in 2012.

In Pakistan in October of 2012, my group of peace activists met Malik Jalal, who spoke to us about the effect of drones on his community in Waziristan and later accompanied our caravan up to Tank, a town on the edge of Waziristan, where we joined a lively anti-war rally. I specifically remember Malik Jalal as a handsome man in the prime of life, accustomed to having authority. He had a full beard and wore the garb of a Tribal leader, and spoke about the suffering of his people living under drones. There was humor in his expression and I remember that he laughed and his eyes twinkled when members of our delegation told of being arrested for sitting outside a military base demanding an end to drone wars. Only in response to a direct question did he talk about his own experience. He said that he sometimes slept in the mountains so as not to put his family at risk.



Click the Photo to read Malik Jalal's story in his own words.

Last summer, in 2016, I saw a photo of a man visiting London to share his experience with living under drones and demand that the drones stop flying over Waziristan. His name was Malik Jalal. I thought I recognized the man I had met in Pakistan, but an organizer with my group dismissed the possibility out of hand. I waited a little, then went to my photos and took out a photo to compare with the one in the British news article. ** I was then certain it was the same man. He had aged, and his beard was shorter. He was dressed in ordinary Afghan and Pakhtun garb rather than the robes of a Chieftain. But it was the same Malik Jalal we had met in Pakistan. It was sad, really, to see him so much aged in the few years since I had met him.

This week, when I was researching the story of Faisal bin Ali Jabar, I noticed an article on the Reprieve website about Malik Jalal. They are the ones who hosted him in London last summer, and also hosted the CodePink Peace Delegation to meet Waziri Drone victims in Pakistan. I think the headline I saw last summer was in the Guardian. In any case, what interested me were the details of Malik Jalal's story. When we met him in Pakistan, he had primarily focused his remarks on the suffering of his people. I imagine he did the same when he was in London. However, the article on the Reprieve website described how he was targeted and stalked by US

drones. On repeated occasions, people were blown up by drone in proximity to Jalal's path; a friend expecting him for dinner, people at a meeting he was on his way to attend, a family member who was driving his car, and even a random car the same color as his own traveling down the road behind him.

Malik Jalal is not an Al Qaeda operative or member of the Taliban. As a Malik, he is a tribal leader on the payroll of the Pakistani government. He works as a moderator in resolving tribal disputes and is a senior member of the North Waziristan Peace Committee. While carrying out his duties, he might occasionally attend a meeting with a Taliban member present. They too belong to local tribes, and some hold positions of authority. But there is no possible justification for stalking Malik Jalal to try to kill him, terrorizing his family and killing a number of innocent people who were mistaken for him. But Malik Jalal says that the reason he is being targeted is because he came forward and spoke out against the drone strikes on other members of his community.

In 2011, Reprieve called a Jirga with a lawyer named Shahzad Akbar to bring together the people of Waziristan who wished to end the drone killing in their towns and villages. Another person who came forward to try to end the drone strikes in Waziristan, and they were many, was a teenage boy who offered to search for missile parts in the vicinity around his home town. The Jirga (town hall meeting) must have been infiltrated by CIA agents because within a few days this 16 year old boy was incinerated by a drone strike while driving down the road with his 11 year old cousin. Reprieve and Shahzad Akbar, however, have persevered in their efforts to end drone killing in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere, and they have continued to work with members of the community like Malik Jalal who are willing to come forward with information and to demand that the murderous drone strikes end.

Today, we don't hear about this issue very often in the mainstream news. The war in Afghanistan is going badly. After hearing Malik Jalal's story, this is not surprise. It may be that there are less drone strikes in Pakistan this year, but although the drone strikes in Afghanistan are neither tracked or recorded, they are surely occurring at an accelerated pace. If we are loosing there, perhaps we should look at other solutions than war. There is no moral justification for the US war in Afghanistan and no moral or legal justification for bombing people in the tribal region of Pakistan, a country which is not at war with us. Code Pink invited Shahzad Akbar to come and speak in the US in 2013, but he was unable to get a visa. The Afghan Peace Volunteers and their mentor, Hakim were invited a couple of years later, but also failed to receive visas. These are all peace activists who can inform us about the damage done by US wars in their countries.

Drone wars have drifted out of our attention, but that is not an accident. Since the early days of broad political resistance to the use of drones for targeted killing (execution of suspects) and surveillance, it is become more and more difficult to get specific information about drone strikes. They are reported together with manned air strikes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. But what they don't tell us is that over time, drone strikes have become the majority of aerial attacks. Drone strikes in Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan are not reported at all. Google doesn't bring in the news from foreign news outlets about local drone strikes the way it used to. The news is disappearing before our eyes.

How can we support a peace that will allow a country like Afghanistan to reintegrate? Malik Jalal's story gives us some ideas. The tribal councils can go a long ways towards restoring balance if they can be safely held. Americans have a strongly negative understanding of tribes because they are the indigenous power structure in countries like Afghanistan

that have been resistant to westernization. But is westernization right for Afghanistan, or Pakistan? Maybe not. The United States works through militarization. That is strong suit of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, the only tribal representatives who are empowered through U.S. intervention are violent warlords. These same men are then brought together with westernized rulers to govern the country.

Malik Jalal and his ilk are grass roots leaders who come from the communities they govern and take personal responsibility for the welfare of the people. Tribal leaders at this level actually do represent the people. They can lead an independence movement that really is independent of foreign intervention. These are the men who attend tribal councils and support the public welfare. Warlords and western educated ideologues only have coercive relationships with the people. Grass roots movements are dependent on the people on the ground and their local representatives, men like Malik Jalal. Unfortunately, they cannot safely meet with US drones on the wing. In 2011, a US drone strike in Waziristan killed 54 men at a tribal Jirga where they were meeting to discuss a local mine.

Men like Malik Jalal are deemed terrorists, threatened and targeted by drone strikes, and driven from their homes. Why? They represent the people and not the power structure the U.S. is attempting to impose on their countries. This is true in many places. Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Sadrist movement in Iraq are both engaged in the national political system as well as supporting powerful militias that are determined to protect their countries and their people. So called 'Signature' strikes which target 'suspicious' gatherings make any kind of meeting or gathering dangerous. People are isolated and alienated. Grass roots governance is not the worst basis for the blasted tribal society of Afghanistan. But, drones cause a barrier to that possibility.

I liked Malik Jalal so I wanted to tell you his story. Unfortunately, though the Independent covered his visit in a respectful manner as did the Daily News, they along with some members of the U.S. press wonder why he is in London and has not been arrested. Clarissa Ward, a bold modern woman, a professional journalist, became a friend of Al Qaeda in Syria, willing to report from East Aleppo while it was still held by Ahrar Al Sham, Al Nusra and ISIS last fall, standing in an empty street dressed in a black dress with veil and hijab in a city where women were liberated from that requirement decades ago.

Under the Tabloid style headline: I'm on the U.S. Kill List Pakistani Elder Claims. Clarissa Ward tells you that she doesn't buy his claim. Ms. Ward criticizes Malik Jalal as paranoid and a complainer. She wonders how he could he have got a visa to the UK if he were on the U.S. 'kill list'. Malik Jalal didn't jump on a plane to NY because he could never get a visa there, and men identified for targeted killing are routinely not arrested. The idea is to avoid the complexity of a legal confrontation. Dead men tell no tales.

Clarissa Ward is both arrogant and ignorant. She doesn't listen. Clarissa Ward didn't meet Malik Jalal near the beginning of his ordeal when he spoke to a group of foreign peace activists on behalf of his community without mentioning his own suffering. Her world is firmly under control unlike the real world she pretends to unveil for her listeners. Ms. Ward pretends. That is her job. Malik Jalal lives the nightmare the pretenders want to erase. Jalal was brought to London by Reprieve, an organization that defends drone strike victims, Guantanamo prisoners and men on death row. Reprieve is the real deal. Malik Jalal represents the real people of Waziristan.

Jalal came to London for relief nearly 4 years after sharing his story, along with several other survivors of drone strike victims, with my delegation in Islamabad. He he had come

forward to a meeting arranged and facilitated by Shahzad Akbar to reach a broader audience. We brought their stories back but it wasn't enough to end the killing and was soon dropped by the ever busy news cycle. Malik Jalal says that he fears to go home now. He doesn't want to die and he wants his family to be safe. Imagine! What if your friends and family members were regularly killed when they attempted to interact with you? It was sad for me to see the man who so proudly represented his people 4 years before, now terrorized into leaving his country to seek relief. It was heartbreaking to see his face lined with stress to the point where those who had met him with me did not recognize him, and so did not support him.

But this is, and has been from the start, the U.S. pretense of 'a War on Terrorism'. Peace loving leaders of indigenous communities, men like Malik Jalal, are threatened, stalked and then ridiculed. Extremist murderers holed up in East Aleppo flying ISIS and Al Nusra (Al Qaeda) flags and shelling civilian housing and schools that happen to border their territory in West Aleppo are presented as noble 'rebels' and their defeat continues to be mourned by the U.S. mainstream media and some alternative venues, even as residents of liberated communities return home in the hundreds of thousands. In Syria, Clarissa Ward happily complied with the oppressive demands with regard to women's dress asserted by a mostly foreign force controlling the area. She presents this as adopting to a 'Syrian' cultural requirement. Apparently she never took the time to research the common culture of Syria before the war began.

In Yemen, the drone strikes against AQAP (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) were gobbled up by a war against all the people of Yemen. Now AQAP, a Saudi ally on the ground, controls vastly more territory in Yemen than before the war, while the United States gives unbounded support to the Saudi air war that is tearing the country apart. They claim to be

fighting AQAP with a deadly drone strike here and there, while they are all in supporting the Saudi war against Houthi 'Shia terrorists', an indigenous militia that is a broadly popular movement in the north part of the country who are allied with the remnants of the Yemeni army. The 'internationally recognized' government of Yemen that the Saudis and their allies claim to fight for is a joke; one man; a single, unpopular, temporary 'president' who refused to call an election when his term had ended, for some reason internationally recognized as the rightful ruler of Yemen. The United States and the United Nations are ready to stand by while Yemen is subjected to a genocidal mix of famine and disease caused by U.S. assisted bombing of public infrastructure and a siege enabled by U.S. and western European ships in the Arab Sea blocking access to Yemeni ports.

We call Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Sadrists in Iraq 'terrorists' despite the fact that both organizations are deeply involved in the politics of their respective countries, both support secular governance despite the fact that they are movements lead by Shia clerics, and both groups have political alliances with movements backed by other religious organizations. Muqtada al Sadr has met with the Kurdish government and with the respected Council of Sunni Scholars. Hezbollah is allied with one of the Christian currents in Lebanon, supports the liberation of Palestine and has seen the danger of a regional wave of extremist violence. Both Hezbollah and the Sadrists are popular grass roots organizations that grew out of civil wars initiated by western interventions. Both have powerful militias, but neither has fought beyond the mandate to protect their own country. Yet the U.S. designates them as the most dangerous of terrorists in league with their sworn enemies in ISIS and Al Qaeda because Hezbollah is capable of defending Lebanon against Israel, and the Sadrists support a secular socialist government in Iraq.

Populist leaders and grass roots leaders are the ultimate enemy of American hegemony. They operate below the radar when they are at their best. They are trusted because they are men who come from the people and who have not forgotten their roots, and because they choose to support the welfare of the people above their own. They can't be bought and they don't make good proxies for empire.

And so dear Malik Jalal, you have my highest respect wherever you are, in London or somewhere in Pakistan. I pray that one day you will be able to go home and live in peace with your family. And that all the victims of U.S. aggression and the violence of U.S. allies will be restored to your homes and your lives. I bow to your suffering and to your dignity. I raise your name so that you and the others like you will not be forgotten.

****Featured Image:** *Malik Jalal with his family ~Printscreen From CNN/Reprieve Video, April 22, 2016*

**** Note:** I went to look for a video recording I made of Malik Jalal in Pakistan in late 2012, but YouTube had removed (deleted) it from my account since the last time I looked – some time in the last few months.

Drone News Has Dried Up

People do need to understand how challenging the current environment is for everyone. I was talking yesterday to a friend about how the background information is becoming more and more difficult to access. Even alternative news sites have a cycle of sorts related to what information they focus on. Drone information in particular has been under attack for some time.

When I started the Upstate Drone Action Website in 2011, there was virtually no news about drones anywhere. I created an aggregator using a Google aggregator I had created, that searched widely for Drone news. It started turning up mostly reports on US drone strikes in English language news outlets in Pakistan and other international sources including the international versions of the New York Times and CNN. But even so, I initially found only a few hits a month. I was trying to triangulate various sources on the same strike at the time so I posted them all.

By 2014 and 2015 the same news aggregator was turning out so many reports, still majority international, I had started organizing them so that I could collect all the posts on a particular event. It also turned up links to all kinds of US reports reflecting on Drone strikes as well as discussions of drone warfare in progressive blogs. After a while, I couldn't keep up any more. There were hundreds of hits each month.

Suddenly, in 2015 and 2016, all the real news disappeared from the feed created by my tool. Increasingly, the reports were dominated by discussions of domestic drone uses and domestic legal issues, mostly referring to little low flying drones used to snoop or capture footage of ongoing events. The conversation turned to 'delivery drones' something I think is an absolutely stupid and unworkable idea; cowboys shooting down drones over their property. Drones for rescue and research. Well, you get the picture. There were exceptions but they became fewer and farther between.

As the peak for drone news collapsed, a site that regularly published my work rejected a major research piece on military drones and the ways in which drone news was distorted and covered up in mainstream sources. The main editor wrote me thank you for the piece, but the person actually posting articles chose to ignore it. Drones didn't interest him or her.

Currently I rarely, if ever, see an article focused on a drone strike in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Somalia or any of the other countries where drone strikes have significantly increased since the beginning of this year. Today my aggregator turned up several articles claiming that Chinese, Iranian and Russian drones are getting in the way of US business as usual. But, my feed no longer reports any US drone strikes despite the fact that they have significantly increased since Trump came into office. If you look at it, you would think that military drones, targeted killing and spying are on an asymptotic approach to zero. You would never dream that military drone strikes have doubled under President Trump.

I shared this information at a meeting earlier today, along with an article from the World Socialist Web Site, Google's new search protocol is restricting access to 13 leading socialist, progressive and anti-war web sites. The article talks about progressive websites but in fact many libertarian and right leaning websites have been targeted by Google as well. The 'Fake News' targets are decided by a committee with representatives of the New York Times, The Washington Post, Google and others of a similar ilk. They are identified as channeling 'Russian propaganda', but what they actually do is offer a forum for a broad based discussion of the U.S. political sphere, along with U.S. domestic and foreign policy. In another article, New Google algorithm restricts access to left-wing, progressive web sites, WSWS asserts:

In the three months since Google implemented the changes to its search engine, fewer people have accessed left-wing and anti-war news sites. Based on information available on Alexa analytics, other sites that have experienced sharp drops in ranking include WikiLeaks, Alternet, Counterpunch, Global Research, Consortium News and Truthout. Even prominent democratic rights groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Amnesty International appear to have been hit.

Not everyone at the meeting was prepared to believe the information I presented and many don't particularly favor the World Socialist Organization as an authoritative source, but they do hold some of the other sites on the 'Fake News' list in very high esteem. That's an important point. These sites are not all coming from the same political perspective but they all provide a platform for open discussion and deep reporting of events covered in a very narrow manner by the mainstream media.

In any case, James Swarts, a long time stalwart in the local antiwar movement, went home to test the hypothesis that Google is not carrying stories on military drone activity and not reporting hits on blacklisted sites. Here is his report:

In reference to the issue of information blackout or drone action since The Drump took office I found a quick Internet search turned up many articles, but most of them are already very dated. However, some may be worth checking out such as the following:

- <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/drone-war/data/get-the-data-a-list-of-us-air-and-drone-strikes-afghanistan-2017>
- <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/drone-war/data/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-2017>
- <http://www.defenseone.com/news/2017/03/the-d-brief-march-03-2017/135869/>
- http://www.repriev.org/drones/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwqXMBRCDA RI sAD - AQ2ggRvAEFv0c29rzRpKMPV - 0xTN1vz8jKID - ULNPqumriLgwNxMegz4aAhvqEALw_wcB (Mostly an Ad for donations but some background)
- http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2017/03/09/is_the_us_responsible_for_more_civilian_casualties_since_trump_took_office.html
- <http://www.newsweek.com/trumps-war-civilian-deaths-syria-577353>
- <http://www.activistpost.com/2017/03/u-s-drone-strikes-g>

one-432-since-trump-took-office.html

Unfortunately, as was brought out at the meeting, it appears Google is limiting hits and you have to use several search engines to find any current reports [at all]. Obviously this is a concern to be further investigated.

If you would like to make a comparison with regard to the availability of Drone News, here is the page of hits, mostly from my Google aggregator for the first quarter of 2014, and the one from the second quarter of 2013.

In Google tweaks search results to squash fake news, published by C|net news (owned by CBS) on April 25, Google's plan to excise 'Fake News' from their results is explained as follows:

Google announced Tuesday that it's changing how its search engine works to "surface more high quality content from the web." The search engine giant said that about 0.25 percent of its results had "offensive or clearly misleading content," and it set out to fix that by changing how results are ranked and introducing reporting tools for users.

Over the last month, after Google updated its search quality guidelines, it used testers to weed out low-quality content, which included fake news, offensive results and bogus conspiracy theories. The search giant collected the data from the evaluators and is applying it to the ranking algorithm to push fake news further down in search results.

Unfortunately, my experience with drone news tells us that this practice is not entirely new in Google. A practice already in place regarding certain subjects has merely been broadened and systematized. I would, in fact, think it likely that the removal of Drone news from Google output was a test. Did anyone complain? Was there a public outcry? No. So, it was safe to create a back story and put the big

censorship program in place. 1984 has come and gone. The Imperial Seal is in place.

What really is frightening is that many of the tools we take for granted for maintaining our websites and enhancing them are controlled by Google. Google can and will take your site down if it is deemed threat. So far, this has been a response to malware (like viruses), but they can do it for whatever reason they choose. Once it is blocked by your browser only Google can clear it to be displayed again. Google has a web administrator site that offers tools to check your site for problems, and also output data to assess how many hits your site is getting, and how they are distributed in a variety of contextual matrices.

Many of the sites on the 'Fake News' list use a Google plug-in to power the search engine that is engaged when you put a topic, author or title into the little search window at the top of the Home Page. Google tools are used by the most popular SEO (Search Engine Optimization) tools for bloggers because they are advising you on how to get your blog a good listing with Google. These tools make you do some work, but, if Google won't list your site anyway, then why bother. Google provides the engine for mapping plug-ins, email plug-ins and all kinds of services that you can get for free for you website or blog. Google handles all of our email in many cases.

What if they decide to begin censoring email? Will they tell you in advance? Google list serves won't post emails to the account of the sender (if they have a gmail address). They didn't announce this, so many of us thought we'd been kicked off our list. When I looked it up, I found no way to complain.

We have been struggling to keep network neutrality alive so those of us who just want to discuss the issues on our own terms can continue to do so without technical interference.

Now the mainstream news is using the most powerful Internet management company/s (Facebook is doing this too) to block the free flow of information. So far, you and I can still go to our favorite source of information and discussion to see what people are talking about, but new people are shut out. No one will get the information on a equal footing with the mainstream stories when the search for information on a given topic is limited to a few US based corporate outlets. This is very bad news and it needs to be shared widely.