

UNAC joins “Stopp Ramstein!” Protests

by Phil Wilayto, originally published on **End the Wars at Home and Abroad**, July 1, 2018

It's a beautiful evening here in Kaiserslautern, a city of some 100,000 in southwestern Germany. There's a light breeze blowing, gently nudging the thousands of multi-colored flowers that seem to line every street. Couples, young families and older folks are strolling through this city whose beginnings go back to the time of the Roman Empire.

And tomorrow, thousands of people are expected to gather here and attempt to block the entrance to the U.S. Ramstein Air Force Base. I'll be one of them.

Ramstein is one of the largest of the Pentagon's 800 military bases established in more than 70 countries. South Korea has the largest number (could this be why North Korea is a little suspicious of U.S. intentions?). Japan is number two, and Germany comes in third.

Ramstein serves as headquarters for the U.S. Air Forces in Europe, Air Forces Africa and also NATO Allied Air Command. The military base is really huge, with some 54,000 military personnel, plus their families, which means this U.S. base pretty much dominates this German town. In fact, German officials and politicians are not allowed to enter the base without permission from the U.S. commander.

But, just like with the Navy in Norfolk and Virginia Beach, the base is an important source of local employment, business contracts and trade, which is probably why the Catholic Church where around 40 protest organizers have been meeting this week came under heavy local pressure not to allow us to gather there. But the church stood its ground and there have been no

problems – so far.

The reason the German peace movement has targeted Ramstein is not only because of its massive size, but because of the critical role it plays in the Pentagon's strategy of fighting wars using pilotless drones. These expensive little machines can drop bombs on targets all over the world, with no threat to U.S. lives, and so no risk of stirring up unpleasant antiwar feelings back home.

It's nice, clean warfare, in which the only people who die have brown skins. And if the intended target happens to be at a wedding, a funeral or praying in a mosque on Friday night, then there might be what the Pentagon quaintly calls "*collateral damage*" – a very sanitized word that seems obscene when applied to a lifeless child torn apart by a bomb we paid for with our taxes.

The drones do have human pilots, but they work in air-conditioned buildings back in the States. The pilots send instructions to Ramstein, where they are then routed to the many drone bases around the world. No Ramstein, no drones. And that is why there have been huge annual protests here.

When the base's key role in drone warfare first came to light in 2015, the German government claimed it hadn't been informed about this function of the U.S. base. The reports were later supported by data provided by whistleblower Edward Snowden and investigative reporter Glenn Greenwald from classified documents from inside the U.S. administration.

I'm here representing the United National Antiwar Coalition, which the Virginia Defenders helped found back in 2010. I've been meeting lots of German peace activists, as well as folks from Italy, Spain, South Korea, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom and several from the U.S., including Ann Wright, the former U.S. Army colonel and State Department official now known worldwide for her antiwar activities. She'll be a

featured speaker at the main rally outside the base tomorrow.

Also here are Pat Elder, a longtime antiwar activist from Maryland who has done some incredible work countering military recruitment in our public schools. And Dave Webb from the United Kingdom, who works with the U.S.-based Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space. And John Lannon, a professor at Ireland's University of Limerick, who will be a key organizer of an international conference called to oppose U.S. and NATO foreign military bases that will take place this November in Dublin.

This week's peace activities are being sponsored by the German organization "**Stopp Air Base Ramstein.**" Beginning on June 23, there have been discussions, workshops and a "*peace camp*" that reminds me of Occupy Richmond, with its many small tents and communal spirit. Today there was an all-day meeting at which Ann, Pat, John, Dave and I were among the many speakers. At the end of the meeting the organizers released a statement calling on the European Union to open all its borders to refugees, arguing that it has been the U.S. and NATO wars in North Africa and the Middle East that have caused the refugee crisis in the first place. The right-wing in Europe has seized on the refugee crisis to whip up hatred of immigrants, much like the Trump regime is doing in the U.S.

Tonight there's a large public event held at the Reconciliation Church Kaiserslautern. And then the highlight of the week will be a large demonstration and rally tomorrow, followed by a mass blockade in front of the main entrance to the base, followed by a cultural event with a party in the peace camp. (See <https://www.ramstein-kampagne.eu/.../stopp-airbase-rastein-2.../>)

So what am I doing here, thousands of miles from home, when I could be protesting any number of injustices back in Richmond? Well, it's because all these things are related. Like the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat

to injustice everywhere." That saying is featured on the front page of the current issue of The Virginia Defender.

Today the U.S. is openly at war in at least seven countries in the Middle East and Africa: Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Libya and Somalia. It's conducting covert wars in other countries, from the Philippines in Asia to Mali and Niger in West Africa. It carries out provocative military exercises on the very borders of Russia. All this is in the name of "*national security*," although there are no Russian bases in Canada, no Chinese ships off the coast of San Francisco, no joint North Korean-Mexican maneuvers in the Gulf of Mexico.

And man, are these wars expensive! The U.S. military budget is larger than that of the next seven or eight countries combined, and that includes both China and Russia. Military spending sucks up half our federal tax dollars. (They tell us it's only 25 percent, but the Defense Department budget doesn't include nuclear weapons, which come under the Department of Energy; or care for the hundreds of thousands of veterans, which comes under the Veterans Administration; or interest payments on the national debt – largely the result of borrowing money to pay for past wars. Those payments are now nearly equal to the Defense Department budget.

So when they tell you there's no money to fix Richmond's decaying public schools, no money for more bus routes, no money to create public jobs at living wages and that we're running out of money for Social Security and Medicare, please remember where half your federal tax dollars are going. For war.

I'll be on the road here in Europe for the next couple of weeks, trying to learn as much as I can about the progressive movement here and how activists are addressing poverty, racism and war. I'll post my reports here as often as I can.

Meanwhile, if you'd like to help support this work, please think about kicking in a little something for travel expenses.

You can do this at: unacpeace.org.

Until next time,

Phil Wilayto

Editor, The Virginia Defender

Member, UNAC Administrative Committee

A Tale of Two Atrocities

by **Doug Noble**

Donald Trump's latest strike on Syria, pulled off without Congressional approval and in blatant violation of US and international law. Reporting in breathless detail the weapons used and the sites bombed, the mainstream media seem to agree with President Trump that Syrian President Bashar Assad is a "Gas Killing Animal" responsible for the ghastly deaths of Syrian innocents in a chemical attack, one which demands swift, forceful retaliation. This rush to judgment comes even as international organizations have yet to conduct any formal investigations into the evidence of what, if anything, happened in Douma and who is responsible.

Now compare this intense media coverage of the alleged Syrian chemical attacks to the near silence accorded the horrific civilian massacre perpetrated by Israeli soldiers in Gaza, at the very same time. The Gazan health ministry reports that at least 34 unarmed Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces over the past weeks, with hundreds more injured during six weeks of planned demonstrations titled the "Great March of

Return.” which largely consisted of tire-burning and prayer. Human Rights Watch denounced the killings as “calculated” and “unlawful.” A video of an Israeli sniper shooting an unarmed Palestinian man is but one example of the substantial available evidence of this deliberate killing of innocent civilians. After the sniper shoots the man, one of the soldiers yells “yes!” and “son of a bitch!” in celebration as a crowd rushes toward the body. Israel’s defense minister Avigdor Lieberman rejected calls for an inquiry into these Israeli killings of Palestinians, saying soldiers along the Gaza frontier “deserve a medal” for what they did. The United States, rather than labeling Lieberman a “killing animal,” instead blocked a Kuwait-drafted U.N. Security Council statement that would have called for an independent investigation. And the mainstream media says next to nothing.

Three differences in the reportage here are readily apparent: First, the evidence: In contrast to still unverified reports of who’s responsible for the alleged Syrian attacks, there is overwhelming first-hand video evidence of the flagrant massacre of unarmed Palestinian civilians in Gaza by Israeli soldiers. Second, the manner of killing. The alleged murder of civilians using chemical weapons apparently calls for worldwide moral indignation and humanitarian retaliation, whereas indiscriminate murder by sniper rifles, as done by Israel in Gaza, causes no such concern. Third, the victims: the US media’s almost total neglect of the brutal murders of innocent Palestinian men, women and children leads to the inescapable conclusion that, in contrast to Syrian victims, Palestinian victims don’t matter.

How do we account for this discrepancy? Thirty years ago Noam Chomsky and Ed Herman explained it incisively in their book on US mass media called Manufacturing Consent. Their seminal insight was the distinction between worthy and unworthy victims. They showed through copious research that the US media consistently portray people abused or murdered by enemy

states, such as Syria, as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or even greater severity by US client states, such as Israel, are ignored as unworthy victims.

They also showed that as long as the major media outlets endorse official US consensus – say, that Assad is a “Gas Killing Animal” – they are not required to produce credible evidence, construct serious arguments, or present extensive documentation. Meanwhile, the public generally does not even notice the chilling silence accorded to unworthy victims of client states like Israel, whose suffering is drowned out by the disingenuous humanitarian outcry for the suffering of worthy victims of enemy states like Syria.

Of course what determines whether victims are worthy or unworthy has nothing to do with their actual suffering, or the ghastliness of their deaths, but rather with whether the state perpetrating the suffering is friend or foe. Conclusive demonstration of this is that Assad’s alleged Syrian victims are deemed worthy and must be avenged, whereas the Syrian victims of US airstrikes and drones are almost invisible, as unworthy as their suffering Palestinian counterparts. Such is the monstrous, lethal calculus of the criminal US regime and its criminally complicit media.

Doug Noble is a long time peace activist in Rochester, NY. He works with the Upstate Drone Action coalition as well as Rochester Metro Justice and Peace Action and Education.

The Wars Abroad Meet the War at Home

by Felton Davis of NYC Catholic Worker

Below is the announcement sent out by Isaac at Action Corps NYC, and a couple of the photo sets from Monday's demonstration across from the United Nations.

It was a long twenty hours "in the system," as the process from the precinct through the labyrinth of basement holding cells, to the courtroom at 100 Centre Street is known. My vest photo of Nora Al-Awlaki was taken by the officers of the Strategic Response Group at the US Mission, and put into an envelope with my house keys, belt and shoelaces, then returned to me outside the courtroom. The officers told me that unless someone showed up at court with my real ID, I would not be released or get any property back.



August 20, 2013

The guys in the holding cell, most from a drug sweep in Washington Heights, were among the rowdiest group of arrestees that I have ever had the privilege of doing time with.

Jumping up and down to stay warm, calling out to the correctional officers for toilet paper, smacking each other around, slamming down the pay phone trying to get through to friends and family, and last but not least, going around the cell to figure out who in their circle was going to get charged with what. They assured me that the DA would not ask for bail in my case, whether or not I identified myself, but in fact, when we were all brought upstairs and into the courtroom, the DA did ask for \$1000 bail, given my numerous open cases, and *“extensive interstate contacts.”*

A much more thorough discussion of the issues involved in present-day antiwar efforts took place in the holding cell than will ever take place in the courtroom, as I tried to explain the context for our demonstration for the suffering people of Yemen. We've been at war – undeclared, unauthorized, whatever – for so many years, with so many countries, none of whom are a threat to us, that it has become a permanent condition, and takes a special effort to bring into awareness. The guys had no disagreement with that, and as far as war constituting theft from urgent social needs, they cited numerous examples in their personal lives.

“You know how many of my neighbors I have had to rob on the street just so my kid will eat?”

I refrained from attempting to answer that question, instead offering the opinion that on the international scene, this robbery is having a devastating effect all throughout the Middle East, as nation after nation is targeted. *“People are going to hate us...”*

“They already hate us! You don't know that?” They shook their heads in bewilderment.

“Everything we got in this country is because it was stolen, and stolen by force! Where the FUCK have you been?”

Twenty hours was not enough time for me to go through all the demonstrations over the years that have concluded with a trip to Central Booking, but I did explain to the guys that in the 1980's, before some of them were born, there was no toilet in the men's cell, and arrestees would have to pee on the floor in the corner. Then I accidentally compared that little bit of progress with the abolition of slavery, and received another instantaneous verdict from the jury.



"Fuckin bullshit! You think slavery was abolished? You're crazy! Slavery was not abolished, it was just..."

The discussion continued in Spanish as the guys searched for the most accurate word for what happened to the institution of slavery. And slowly (very slowly without caffeine), the day dawned and we were moved along through the labyrinth. I told the legal aid attorney who I was, and the DA already seemed to know – probably from my fingerprints – and so there was no need to inquire whose *"extensive interstate contacts"* were under review, mine or John Does. The judge would not order bail, and so I was released on ROR, and scheduled for trial on Wednesday, January 17th.

#LetYemenLive Emergency Protests Break Out Across US

Monday the NYPD arrested 15 people for blocking entry to the US Mission to the United Nations, while others protested at the Saudi mission, the Saudi office in Los Angeles, and at the Hart Senate Offices in DC, all under the **#LetYemenLive** protest name. Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK, reported there was a demonstration in Houston, too. The demonstration in New York included approximately 50 people, while the one in DC included 15, and the one in LA 10. Those in DC sang Christmas

carols with original lyrics to US Senators.

*NYC: 14 arrested at Yemen solidarity protest by Erik McGregor
#YemenSolidarity #HandsOffYemen #LetYemenLive #EndTheWars
pic.twitter.com/jIdS5DljMw*

– Pacific Press Agency (@PPA_NewsPhoto) December 12, 2017

Friday the White House reiterated its call for humanitarian access in Yemen. As the world's worst famine approaches, 19 organizations participated in the emergency protest at the UN Monday. Participants performed civil disobedience against the US-backed Saudi war, visually representing Yemeni children killed and orphaned from the war. They called for an end to humanitarian and commercial blockade against Yemen, and for a cease fire by all sides.

*Yemen is starving. At the UN today to say #LetYemenLive. The Trump regime is fueling& ramping up this humanitarian crisis.
#TrumpPenceMustGo pic.twitter.com/plDFmjaPK9*

– #TrumpPenceMustGo (@RefuseFascism) December 11, 2017

The Catholic Worker organized the NYC demonstration. Speakers included two-time presidential candidate David McReynolds, Kate Alexander from Peace Action New York State, and Carmen Trotta, of the Catholic Worker. Dr. Debbie Almontaser provided a statement that was read by a representative of Action Corps NYC. Supporting organizations include: *Voices for Creative Nonviolence, World Beyond War, Code Pink, Pax Christi Metro NY, Peace Action New York State, NYC Raging Grannies, Kairos Community, KnowDrones.com, Action Corps NYC, Granny Peace Brigade, Uptown Progressive Action, Sander Hicks for Congress, Rise and Resist NY, Veterans For Peace – NYC Chapter 034, NYC War Resisters League, Women in Black Union Square, 15th Street Quakers Peace & Social Justice Committee, and World Can't*

Wait.

Statement from Action Corps NYC:

“Time is running out for the people of Yemen, who are experiencing the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. With seven million people on the brink of starvation, the country will face the largest famine since WWII if Saudi Arabia continues the war and blockade. This blockade cuts access to much-needed medical supplies. Over half of healthcare facilities in the country are nonfunctional, worsening Yemen’s cholera outbreak with total cases possibly reaching one million by the end of this month. The US must use its influence to stop the blockade and must ultimately stop supporting the war.”

Shut Down Creech!

Gather at Creech to say “NO” to Drone Killing

March 4-6, 2015

Shut down Creech Pink Drone Trailer, by John Amidon