

Hancock Drones and Grass Roots Street Heat

Why Street Heat?

Back in the eighties when the U.S. anti-apartheid movement was at a boil, “Doonesbury” had a sequence satirizing the “activists” who spent all their time at their computers. At the time I thought those geeks were a pretty odd bunch.

Though I’ve yet to succumb to Facebook, etc., now as an activist I too have become computer-domesticated. I spend lots of time generating or responding to email or chasing after links. For better or worse, on-line is now one of my comfort zones. Maybe too comfortable.

Historically and currently, here and abroad, much, maybe most, necessary grassroots change only really begins when people join in solidarity and indignation in the “street.”

What is this thing we here in Central New York call “street heat”?

It’s a way of making it easy to start getting out into the street. It’s a way to get off our duffs, to break out of our cocoons – overcoming that seemingly deep hesitation about going public.

Since 2010 at 4:15 p.m. every first and third Tuesday of the month a handful of us have been going out to the main entrance of Hancock Air Base, the hunter/killer Reaper drone hub in our back yard, on East Molloy Road in the Syracuse suburb of DeWitt. There for 45 minutes we stand facing the traffic with our anti-militarism signs. This time slot is the civilian rush hour on East Molloy and shift change at the base.

From early November through the end of March, our cold and

dark season, we're only out there on first Tuesdays. That day has its macabre significance: each Tuesday Mr. Obama and his advisors choose the targets for the next six months for drone assassination in the Islamic oil lands – assassinations which are immoral, illegal and, while tactically clever, are probably strategically stupid.

We place ourselves across the road from those Reaper drone robots remotely operated over Afghanistan by 174th Attack Wing of the NY National Guard based at Hancock.

We seek to prick the conscience of the Hancock personnel, cogs in Hancock's criminal role in the war machine. We also seek to reach the public driving by. Our signs declare variously,

*"DRONES FLY,
CHILDREN DIE"*



and

"BAN WEAPONIZED DRONES" and "STOP DRONE TERRORISM"

and

"U.S. OUT OF THE MIDDLE EAST,"

etc.

Without our persistent presence week in, week out, year in, year out, it's all too easy, given U.S. mainstream media, for folks to forget that the U.S. is engaged in perpetual war – a war not “on” terrorism, but “of” terrorism. And it's all too easy for airbase personnel, leading their classified, insulated, indoctrinated lives to forget they are part of a war machine.

Weaponized Drones And The Endless “War on Terror”

Ed Kinane at Left Forum

Session 7, 3:40 to 5:40 p.m., Sunday, May 22, 2016

Room 1,127

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, NYC

Panel with Ed K., Nick Mottern, Debra Sweet, Shelby Sullivan-Bennis

Moderator: Amanda Bass

Like the phony “war on drugs,” the phony “war on terrorism” promotes economic interests, serves political agendas, entrenches militarism. Neither war reduces drug use or violence. Nor are they designed to.

Terrorism – past and present – pervades the U.S. psyche and economy. Terrorism, so-called, and the fear thereof, blunts our minds, shrinks our hearts. This contrived national obsession gives the Pentagon and NSA/Homeland Security their ever-expanding powers. It tightens their grip. It swells their coffers.

Their bloated budgets, like the Congress that funds them, march to corporate drummers. Since World War II, terrorism/militarism has been exceedingly profitable for the so-called "defense" industry (think, for example, Lockheed Martin). U.S. corporations thrive on the export of weapons and weapon systems. Peace kills the war economy. Why seek peace?

The high-tech war industry – the U.S. economy's warped backbone – enriches the rich, deprives the poor. Military spending sucks the life out of civil society. That military spree, barely monitored, finances death-dealing projects; these profit-intensive projects preempt job-intensive, life-serving ones.

Pentagon budgets assure grossly underfunded housing, schooling, health and infrastructure development. Along with the nuke industry – now in its eighth decade – the perpetuated terrorism/militarism nexus drives economic disparity, propping up this nation's class structure.

Patriots and propagandists endlessly invoke, but seldom define, "terrorism." Now, I'll do the unusual – I'll define "terrorism." Terrorism is the use, or threat, of violence against civilians for military, political or economic ends. This definition cuts to the chase, cuts through the layers of jingoism and obfuscation perpetrated by the patriots and propagandists.

The definition has four corollaries:

~ First. Contrary to U.S. mainstream media usage, terrorists aren't inevitably people of color. Nor are they primarily swarthy or sallow. Here in the U.S. the term "terrorism" somehow only applies to what they – non-whites – do, not to what whites or the U.S. does.

~ Second. In the 20th and 21st centuries, it's fascism and capitalism that have colonized the skies. Hence most terrorism has been aerial: V-2 rockets, Cruise missiles,

Hellfire missiles, napalm, white phosphorus, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, weaponized drones...

~ Third. Most terrorism is wholesale, not retail; most is state terrorism. Most terrorism is perpetrated by uniformed military. In these centuries most war casualties – in their tens of millions are civilian.

~ Last. Since at least August 6, 1945 the Pentagon has been the world's most relentless single purveyor of terrorism.

Bottom line: the so-called "war on terror" is a racist war, a war for hegemony, a war for profit. It's a war its perpetrators and its perpetuators have no desire to see end.

Terror is nothing new; it's built into this nation's DNA. Consider the continent-wide armed robbery of indigenous lands. Thanks to their higher tech weaponry, European invaders ethnically cleansed Native Americans – mostly non-combatants. Like our counterparts in Israel and other colonial settler states, U.S. Americans militarily occupy stolen land.

Yes, we are occupiers – and by a curious inversion or dialectic, now it is U.S. Americans who are finding ourselves occupied. The occupation is so incremental, so normalized, it's barely visible to us.

If the U.S.-as-occupied-nation notion seems outlandish, consider the following:

- why was the interstate highway system built to military specification by a general,
- or why does the NSA so comprehensively monitor our phones and email,
- or why is every effort is made to keep the U.S. people distracted and dumbed down,
- or why does the judiciary neglect the First Amendment and why, despite Article Six of the Constitution, does the judiciary ignore International Law (*much as Southern*

judges ignored lynching),

- or why are the police so heavily armed and drilled in military shoot-to-kill tactics,
- or why does the U.S. have such a vast prison system,
- or why do military bases, in all their redundancy, proliferate throughout the land,
- or – and this brings us directly back to today’s panel – why are surveillance and weaponized drones, so deadly overseas, increasingly flying over the U.S.?

Further, regarding our national DNA, consider the centuries-long wholesale abduction and displacement of Africans – robbing them of their labor, liberty, languages, dignity and their offspring. Ask: how did such a regime last so long? Without a whip at her back, a noose around his neck, no human endures such rape and servitude. See the film “12 Years a Slave.”

That terror regime in full force lives on today with mass incarceration and what author Michelle Alexander calls “The New Jim Crow.” Police assassinating young black men channel Ku Klux Klan castration. Both are seldom prosecuted. (Note the enduring intersection of impunity and racism.)

We’ve been conditioned to believe terrorism is violence perpetrated by the “other”– the non-white other. Blind to the origins of white supremacy and privilege, we are the legatees of our previous – and ongoing – terrorisms. Only when terrorism is defined do we see Manifest Destiny and slavery for what they were. Only when terrorism is defined do we see that today’s “War on Terrorism” for what it is: a war of, for and by terrorism.

Today’s so-called “War on Terrorism” – quotation marks are a must – features aerial bombing of tribal people and people of color who can barely shoot back: the Anglosphere globalizing its centuries-long terror track.

Since August 6, 1945 the world has been chilled by U.S. nuclear blackmail. Since the grotesquely one-sided air war on Viet Nam and since the 2003 “shock and awe” terror attacks on Baghdad, the world knows it resists the Imperium at its peril. The world knows the U.S. mostly and more readily targets people of color – whether Japanese, Southeast Asian, West Asian, or...American. The dark-skinned world waits, defiantly, wondering who will be next.

Aerial terror can't neutralize, but it does provoke, non-state resistance – a resistance sporadically erupting as terrorism. How convenient for the propagandists! The hunter/killer MQ9 Reaper drone and its cowardly ilk seem for now to be just the thing for taking out so-called “bad guys.” However, for each “bad guy” assassinated, many civilians are killed or maimed. More are recruited to resist. Not smart. While drones can be tactically clever, recruiting your enemy is strategically stupid...unless, of course, you profit from keeping the pot boiling.

Up our way in Central New York the local mainstream media normalizes the hunter/killer Reaper drone remotely piloted from Hancock Air Force Base on the outskirts of Syracuse. The Reaper, a former Hancock commandant boasts, operates over Afghanistan 24/7. These robots are deployed to kill with impunity. The media downplay, if not ignore, drone war illegality, its evasion of due process, its violating others' sovereignty, and the government lies surrounding its terror. The media sanitize Reaper transgression against human bodies and human rights. The media ignore Reaper indecency, Reaper cowardice.

The Syracuse Post-Standard ignores the back story behind any blowback – always called “terrorism” – of those avenging and resisting U.S. aggression. Further, perhaps sensing instinctively what a boon to business drones and arms races are, the Post ignores the deadly prospect of weaponized drone proliferation.

U.S. media has little to say about drone “collateral damage” incinerating and dismembering women and children and other noncombatants, whether within or beyond so-called “legal” war zones. But our local media surely typify U.S. mainstream media. So, let me ask: how many in this room heard much about the killing of 150 unknown human beings by U.S. drones and manned aircraft on a single day, March 7, 2016, in Somalia – Somalia, a desperately poor tribal nation the U.S. isn’t even at war with? This massacre, noted in the New York Times, didn’t rate a blip in the Post-Standard.

The December 17 Post-Standard reported that the Reaper now is actually flying – not just being remotely controlled – out of Hancock Air Force Base and from Syracuse’s civilian international airport. The page 1 story, festooned with color photos, is headlined “REAPER DRONE MAKES HISTORY IN SYRACUSE.”

With no pretense to journalistic balance, such stories fail to note that since 2010 our grassroots group, Upstate Drone Action, has been continually protesting the Hancock Reaper and its operating unit, the 174th Attack Wing of the New York State National Guard. The increasingly militarized local police, at Hancock’s bidding, arrest us as we block Hancock’s main gate and exercise our First Amendment right to petition the government for redress of grievance. Maximum fines and multiple incarcerations ensue.

But the Post-Standard doesn’t acknowledge such erosion of civil liberty. Nor does it investigate or even mention our allegations of Hancock war crime. Further, the Post has been eerily silent about the role that domestic drones are beginning to play in policing and intimidating dissidents and minorities.

Like the 1950s’ “Atoms for Peace” hype masking the dark side of the then-emerging nuclear industry, mainstream media downplay the drone dark side. The Post, it seems, doesn’t want to jinx upstate New York’s becoming the Silicon Valley of an

emerging domestic drone money machine. Over the next several years Governor Cuomo will be subsidizing that industry with tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

What does domestic drone development and deployment have to do with terrorism? Plenty. Like the government-subsidized nuclear industry, the domestic drone industry (again think Lockheed Martin) will maintain the facilities, research, engineering expertise, skilled labor, and operators – i.e. the industrial base – that the Pentagon draws on for its terror wars.

As long as perpetual war keeps yielding corporate profit, state terrorism will keep “making history.” If we let it. ###

[[drone terrorism remarks for 2016 left forum]]

The Ghastly, Remotely Piloted, Robotic Reaper Drone

The Ghastly, Remotely Piloted, Robotic Reaper Drone

by Ed Kinane, Reprinted from Truthout, January 26, 2015

The MQ9 Reaper – now deployed 24/7 over Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere – makes killing too easy. It makes war easier to initiate and perpetuate. US drone wars are started with little or no public awareness or support – and with little apparent stake in the game. The weaponized drone cheapens honor. It cheapens life.

The Reaper kills and maims combatants and noncombatants,

adults and children, infants and elderly. Drone victims are also those left widowed or orphaned, and those – in the hundreds of thousands – who flee the terrorized tribal countryside. Despite the propaganda that saturates US mainstream media, drones are not deployed in a “war on terrorism.” Weaponized drones *are* terror.

Reaper targeting is both precise *and* indiscriminate. *Precise* if and only if the intelligence on the ground is accurate – a very big if. *Precise striking* is too easily confused with *precise selecting*. On average, for every alleged high level adversary assassinated, dozens of family members, neighbors and other noncombatants are also killed.

The British human rights organization, Reprieve, notes that certain al-Qaeda leaders have escaped several drone attacks in which they have been reported killed. Many of those attacks result in “collateral damage,” i.e. other and innocent lives lost. Drone pilots and their chain of command often have no idea who their victims are, or how many they have killed.

Aerial warfare is *cowardly*. The Reaper raises cowardice to new heights. Where there’s no moral compass, where there’s no risk, there’s no courage. Despite the lack of physical risk, drone pilots reportedly often suffer post-traumatic stress disorder. These technicians stalk their human targets for hours or days before launching their Hellfire missiles and 500-pound bombs. From their ergonomic armchairs, they observe the assassination and its aftermath up close and personal. They watch “bugsplat” (pilot talk for victims) try to flee.

Minutes later, the pilot may “double tap” – attacking the first responders who converge on the rubble and carnage. Hours later, they may *triple* tap: targeting those attending the victims’ funeral. Killing and maiming mostly civilians, often far from war zones, drones incite hatred, which can lead to blowback or what might be called *reactive terrorism*: retaliation against suspected informers, aid workers,

journalists and US targets near and far. No one can calculate the half-life of such hatred.

Drones violate national sovereignty (Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, Gaza etc.), thereby defying international law, thereby rendering the entire planet more hate-filled, anarchic and vulnerable. Drone attacks are racist: They almost exclusively target Muslims and people of color (“Christian terrorism”).

US (and, let us not forget, British and Israeli) drone attacks spur proliferation – a drone arms race in which dozens of nations, if only in self-defense, are now acquiring or building weaponized drones. The barbaric use of killer drones creates markets: The deadly robots are first demonstrated eviscerating or vaporizing human flesh, then exported. The barbarity also creates precedents that make all of us, everywhere, less safe

The Pentagon’s PR mantra is that “drones save lives.” Yet the Reaper’s advantages are negated by the larger truth that only in the *short-term* and within *narrow contexts* do they reduce US casualties. (Those casualties of other nations, of course, don’t mean so much. Par excellence, the weaponized drone is the flagship of US exceptionalism.)

Summing up, the Reaper is tactically clever, but strategically stupid. The Pentagon is surely aware of this insufficiency. But the Pentagon doesn’t necessarily seek to “win” its wars. The US military machine seeks to multiply enemies and keep the pot boiling, thereby devouring the national budget and perpetuating mega-profits for its corporate allies. The corporados laugh all the way to the bank.

On the Home Front

Reaper deployment from sites such as Niagara Air Force Base near Buffalo and Hancock Air Force Base near Syracuse in upstate New York extend the war zone to nearby civilian areas.

Like it or not, without our consent, we've become part of the battleground. Upstate New Yorkers didn't enlist in these undeclared, clandestine wars. We are conscripts. Our federal taxes pay for these wars; vast slabs of our national treasure are diverted to the military and away from schooling, health care, mass transit and other infrastructure.

Reaper deployment is cloaked in secrecy, mocking democracy. Reaper security measures (as at Hancock, home of the 174th Attack Wing) lead to civil liberties abuse. Since 2010, recurring nonviolent anti-drone protests at Hancock have led to more than 150 arrests and multiple incarcerations of those exposing Pentagon and CIA Reaper lawlessness. We're arrested outside the base entrance as we assemble, speak out and petition the government for a redress of grievances – First Amendment rights, supposedly.

The drone assassination of non-US civilians has morphed into the assassination of US citizens overseas. Will these criminal attacks – devoid of due process – morph into drone strikes against US citizens within the United States itself? The targets here one day may be antiwar activists or someone's political opponent, or simply those guilty of being young, male and black, or Muslim. Or, as in Afghanistan, someone's or some cartel's rival drug dealer.

The Federal Aviation Administration, charged with regulating the safety of our skies, can't keep up with the burgeoning drone industry and escalating domestic drone use. Even with adequate regulations, enforcement will at best be patchy. The more drones in the air, the more difficult the enforcement. Drones have a high accident rate. Drones accidentally or deliberately invading air traffic lanes are a threat to manned commercial passenger aircraft. The more drones in the air, the more collisions. Drones can be launched anonymously. Their origins can be faked. Drones can be hacked and misdirected.

Although a drone pilot's field of vision is like looking

through a soda straw, drone surveillance technology is almost preternaturally sophisticated. Drones threaten personal privacy, undermining the Fourth Amendment. Police agencies are itching to deploy drones, leading to surveillance without warrants on a mass, indiscriminate scale – pervasive, persistent, wide-area, suspicionless surveillance. Police drones will also surely be used for crowd control, suppressing demonstrations and other First Amendment activity essential to democracy.

Police surveillance drones can be armed with so-called “non-lethal” devices (facial recognition technology, lasers, sound bombs, rubber bullets etc.). These chill public dissent. Non-lethal can morph into lethal crowd control. Do we really trust the increasingly militarized police and the US intelligence agencies to self-enforce constitutional restraints on their domestic spying? Think NSA.

Drone technology is rapidly evolving. As it penetrates the US economy and the US military machine, drone research in these two spheres will cross-pollinate. The Reaper and its successors are on their way to becoming ever more autonomous and unaccountable.

Domestic drone development has commercial and agricultural application. Drones will create jobs. But rarely mentioned is the fact that drones are a form of automation and that automation snuffs out jobs.

The glitz of consumer drone applications *here* is already displacing perceptions of the military mayhem *over there*. Mainstream media hype is already “normalizing” drones (à la the 1950s “Atoms for Peace” campaign providing cover for the then-emerging toxic nuclear industry). Such hype swamps coverage of the vile aspects of drones both domestically and internationally. The multibillion-dollar drone industry has already bought and bamboozled its engineers, its universities, its media and its representatives in Congress.