A New US Air Force Video Game Lets You Drone Bomb Iraqis and Afghans

by Alan McLeod, published on MintPress News, January 31, 2020

The United States Air Force has a new recruitment tool: a realistic drone operator video game you can play on its website. Called the Airman Challenge, it features 16 missions to complete, interspersed with facts and recruitment information about how to become a drone operator yourself. In its latest attempts to market active service to young people, players move through missions escorting U.S. vehicles through countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, serving up death from above to all those designated “insurgents” by the game. Players earn medals and achievements for most effectively destroying moving targets. All the while there is a prominent “apply now” button on screen if players would like to enlist and conduct real drone strikes all over the Middle East.

The game has failed to win over David Swanson, director of the anti-war movement World Beyond War, and the author of War is a Lie.

“It is truly disgusting, immoral, and arguably illegal in that it is recruitment or pre-recruitment of underage children to participate in murder. It is part of the normalization of murder that we have been living through,” he told MintPress News.

Tom Secker, a journalist and researcher into the influence of the military on popular culture was similarly unimpressed by the latest U.S.A.F. recruitment strategy, telling us,

The drone game struck me as sick and demented... On the other
hand, many drone pilots have described how piloting drones and killing random brown people is a lot like playing a video game, because you’re sat in a bunker in Nevada pushing buttons, detached from the consequences. So I guess it accurately reflects the miserable, traumatised, serial killing life of a drone pilot, we can’t accuse it of inaccuracy per se.”

Game Over

Despite the fact that they are rarely, if ever in any physical danger, the military has considerable difficulty recruiting and retaining drone pilots. Nearly a quarter of Air Force staff who can fly the machines leave the service every year. A lack of respect, fatigue and mental anguish are the primary reasons cited. Stephen Lewis, a sensor operator between 2005 and 2010 said what he did “weighs on your conscience. It weighs on your soul. It weighs on your heart,” claiming that the post traumatic stress disorder he suffers from as a consequence of killing so many people has made it impossible for him to have relationships with other humans.

“People think it is a video game. But in a video game you have checkpoints, you have restart points. When you fire that missile there’s no restart,” he said. “The less they can get you to think of what you’re shooting at as human the easier it becomes to you to just follow through with these shots when they come down,” said Michael Haas, another former U.S.A.F. sensor operator. The Airman Challenge game follows this path, using red dots on the screen to represent enemies, sanitizing the violence recruits will be meting out.

“We were very callous about any real collateral damage. Whenever that possibility came up most of the time it was a guilt by association or sometimes we didn’t even consider other people that were on screen,” Haas said, noting that he and his peers used terms like “fun sized terrorist” to
describe children, employing euphemisms like “cutting the grass before it grows too long,” as justifications for their extermination. The constant violence, even from afar, takes a heavy toll on many drone operators, who complain of constant nightmares and having to drink themselves into a stupor every night to avoid them.

Others, with different personalities, revel in the bloodshed. Prince Harry, for example, was a helicopter gunner in Afghanistan and described firing missiles as a “joy.” “I’m one of those people who loves playing PlayStation and Xbox, so with my thumbs I like to think I’m probably quite useful,” he said. “If there’s people trying to do bad stuff to our guys, then we’ll take them out of the game.”

A Nobel Cause

Drone bombing is a relatively new technology. Barack Obama came into office promising to end President Bush’s reckless aggression, even being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. While he slashed the number of American troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, he also greatly expanded U.S. wars in the form of drone bombings, ordering ten times as many as Bush. In his last year in office, the U.S. dropped at least 26,000 bombs – around one every twenty minutes on average. When he left office, the U.S. was bombing seven countries simultaneously: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan._
Up to 90 percent of reported drone casualties were “collateral damage,” i.e. innocent bystanders. Swanson is deeply concerned about the way in which the practice has become normalized: “If murder is acceptable as long as a military does it, anything else is acceptable,” he says, “We will reverse this trend, or we will perish.”

History did not exactly repeat itself with the election of Donald Trump in 2016, but it did rhyme. Trump came to power having made multiple statements perceived as anti-war, strongly criticizing Obama and the Democrats’ handling of the situation in the Middle East. Egged on even by so-called “resistance” media, Trump immediately expanded drone bombings, increasing the number of strikes by 432 percent in his first year in office. The president also used a drone attack to kill Iranian general and statesman Qassem Soleimani earlier this month.

Killing in the Game of

In 2018, the armed forces fell well short of their recruitment targets, despite offering a package of benefits very
attractive to working-class Americans. As a result, it totally revamped its recruitment strategy, moving away from television and investing in micro-targeted online ads in an attempt to reach young people, particularly men below the age of thirty, who make up the bulk of the armed forces. One branding exercise was to create an Army e-sports team entering video game competitions under the military brand. As the gaming website, Kotaku wrote, “Positioning the Army as a game-friendly environment and institution is crucial, or even necessary, to reach the people the Army wants to reach.” The Army surpassed its recruitment goal for 2019.

Although the Airman Challenge game is a new attempt at recruitment, the armed forces have a long history being involved in the video game market, and the entertainment industry more generally. Secker’s work has uncovered the depths of collaboration between the military and the entertainment industry. Through Freedom of Information requests, he was able to find that the Department of Defense reviews, edits and writes hundreds of TV and movie scripts every year, subsidizing the entertainment world with free content and equipment in exchange for positive portrayals. “At this point, it’s difficult to effectively summarise the US military’s influence on the industry, because it’s so varied and all-encompassing,” he said.

The US Army spends tens of millions a year on the Institute for Creative Technologies, who develop advanced tech for the film and gaming industries, as well as in-house training games for the Army and – on occasion – the CIA. The Department Of Defense has supported a number of major game franchises (Call of Duty, Tom Clancy games, usually first or third-person shooters). Military-supported games are subject to the same rules of narrative and character as movies and TV, so they can be rejected or modified if they contain elements the Department Of Defense deems controversial.”
The video games industry is massive, with hyper-realistic first person shooters like Call of Duty being among the most popular genres. Call of Duty: WWII, for example, sold $500 million worth of copies in its opening weekend alone, more money generated than blockbuster movies “Thor: Ragnarok” and “Wonder Woman” combined. Many people spend hours a day playing. Captain Brian Stanley, a military recruiter in California said, “Kids know more about the army than we do... Between the weapons, vehicles, and tactics, and a lot of that knowledge comes from video games.”
Young people, therefore, spend huge amounts of time effectively being propagandized by the military. In Call of Duty Ghosts, for instance, you play as a U.S. soldier fighting against a red-beret wearing anti-American Venezuelan dictator, clearly based on President Hugo Chavez, while in Call of Duty 4, you follow the U.S. Army in Iraq, shooting hundreds of Arabs as you go. There’s even a mission where you operate a drone, which is distinctly similar to the Airman Challenge. U.S. forces even control drones with Xbox controllers, blurring the lines between war games and war games even further.

**Cyber Warfare**

Although the military industrial complex is keen to advertise opportunities for pilots, they go to great lengths to hide the reality of what happens to the victims of airstrikes. The most famous of these is likely the “Collateral Murder” video, leaked by Chelsea Manning to Wikileaks co-founder Julian Assange. The video, which made worldwide news, laid bare the callousness towards civilian lives Haas described, where Air Force pilots laugh at shooting dead at least 12 unarmed civilians, including two Reuters journalists. While those commanders ultimately in charge of military operations in the Middle East appear on television constantly, trying to sanitize their actions, Manning and Assange remain in prison for helping to expose the public to an alternative depiction of violence. Manning has spent the majority of the last decade incarcerated, while Assange awaits possible extradition to the United States in a London prison.

The Airman Challenge video game, for Secker, is merely “the latest in a long line of insidious and disturbing recruitment
efforts by the US military.” “If they feel they have to do this just to recruit a few hundred thousand people to their cause, maybe their cause isn’t worth it,” he said.

Feature photo | A screenshot from the US Air Force’s latest recruitment tool, a video game called the Airman Challenge

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**Why We Persist: Activists Have Protested US Drone Base for Over a Decade**

by **Ed Kinane**, published on *Truthout.org*, December 22, 2019

“All human beings possess the basic right under international law to engage in non-violent civil resistance activities for the purpose of preventing, impeding, or terminating the ongoing commission of [international crime].” – International law expert Francis Boyle

Nonviolent civil resistance against international crime is about effectiveness and persistence. Or as Dorothy Day might say, *faithfulness*. We sow seeds – awakening the cogs in the
machine of imperial crime and informing those who, with their federal taxes, help finance that crime.

But it’s about us — getting off our duffs and out of our comfort zones. Here in Syracuse, New York, we call it “street heat” — baby steps toward resistance, dipping our toes into the waters of risk and sacrifice. The “streets,” where Chris Hedges and Noam Chomsky keep telling us that, if things on this planet are going to turn around, that’s where it has to happen.

In the fall of 2003 in a series of front-page stories, the Syracuse Post-Standard announced with satisfaction that our local Hancock Field Air National Guard Base was becoming the hub for the wondrous weaponized MQ9 Reaper drone. For several days over that Thanksgiving weekend, several of us protested and fasted in downtown Syracuse.

Since then, for the past decade, immediately outside Hancock, with over 170 more protests, activists from what soon became the Upstate Drone Action Coalition have sought to expose the ensuing Reaper drone terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Allies from the Syracuse Peace Council, Veterans For Peace, Voices for Creative Nonviolence and the Catholic Worker have provided the campaign’s life blood.

The Campaign

For 45 minutes every first and third Tuesday of the month, a handful of us locals demonstrate across from Hancock’s main gate. Yes, these are brief demos, but some of us are differently abled and some are “octos” — activists over 80 years old. We face the vehicles going in and out of the base at afternoon shift change. This is also rush hour along East Molloy Road. Our signs and banners urge, “STOP THE KILLING” and “ABOLISH WEAPONIZED DRONES” and “DRONES FLY, CHILDREN
A second, more dramatic element of the campaign is our episodic (roughly twice a year) “tableaux” and street theater blocking the driveway into that main gate. Both approaches — the first with little risk of arrest and the second with inevitable arrests — seek to poke the conscience of the 174th New York Air National Guard’s Attack Wing operating out of Hancock.

Here at our very doorstep, 174th personnel pilot remotely controlled Reaper robots laden with bombs and “precision” Hellfire missiles. Via rapid satellite relay, from within the riskless anonymity of Hancock’s fortified base, those warriors and their chain of command spew death and destruction.

Maybe our repeated poking will afflict their consciences. To the extent that they have eyes to see, the pilots get to witness firsthand on-screen the carnage they perpetrate — scattered and smoldering body parts. Such exposure just may induce “moral injury,” the psychic wound caused by betraying one’s core values. We hope that, despite being offered hefty bonuses, these technicians will refuse to re-enlist. The fewer enlistments, the less death.

Their targets and their civilian victims are mostly uncounted, undefended, unidentified Muslims inhabiting oil-rich lands. Here is Islamophobia with a vengeance. Multitudes are terrorized. If they survive, many become internal or external refugees. And why wouldn’t some also become the imperium’s die-hard foes? As the Pentagon surely counts on, the inevitable blowback generates further mayhem. Such mutually reinforcing (but extremely asymmetrical) mayhems reliably produce the high-tech contracts Lockheed Martin and its ilk thrive on.

It’s usually mid-morning when two of our Upstate Drone Action members and a videographer approach Hancock’s main gate,
unannounced, to hand-deliver a letter through the barbed wire fence to the armed gate-keepers. Addressed to the 174th Attack Wing, the letter urges personnel to uphold their oath to protect the U.S. Constitution. We cite Article Six of that Constitution, which mandates that international treaties and international law are the “Supreme Law of the Land.” Such law, including the legally binding UN Charter, supersedes federal, state and local law. It stipulates that such military aggression amounts to a war crime.

Simultaneously, down the base driveway, our flash mob sets up banners and dramatic props. These, along with our bodies – vertical or horizontal, sometimes clad in hijab or draped in bloody shrouds – block any incoming traffic.

Within minutes, soldiers pop out from behind cement barriers to divert incoming vehicles to Hancock’s other entrances. An officer marches out to inform us – with profound understatement – that we aren’t wanted on base property. Working hand in glove with the military, the town, county and state constabularies arrive, red lights flashing. These, helpfully, draw the public’s gaze to our event. The cops schmooze with the soldiers, taking an hour or two to assemble their forces. Then, having dutifully warned us for the third time to leave, they handcuff us while soldiers confiscate our props. Our supporters across the road chant and sing. Surveillance cameras and police and military videographers record the scene.

At our tableaux and die-ins, up to 38 of us at a time have been arrested. We are driven to cells in area police stations. Despite these many forays onto federal property, military police never arrest us and we’re never charged with federal crimes. Invariably we keep getting two contradictory state charges: trespass (private property) and disorderly conduct (for public places). Both charges are “violations,” a minor matter. Violations for others generally lead to quick release with an appearance ticket. But we get special handling: strip
searches along with the protracted tedium of being booked. After some hours, we are arraigned. In the late evening, we may be released with dates for the DeWitt Town night court. Often there’s bail, not because we are flight risks (we relish our days in court) but as a kind of pre-trial chastisement. Some of us refuse to post bail.

Sometimes, arbitrarily, misdemeanor charges are piled on: obstruction of government administration (OGA) or contempt of court for allegedly defying Orders of Protection (OOP) forbidding us to return to the base. Those stay-away orders “protect” the base commander who has alleged that we physically threaten him. This fiction parallels the perennial propaganda trope that migrants from afar – in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Afghanistan – threaten the U.S. The local judges impose OOPs on dozens of us. Bizarrely re-purposed, OOP wording is derived from child or spouse abuse boilerplate.

Such OOPs have been enforced unevenly. Several years ago, Mary Anne Grady Flores, a grandmother from Ithaca, New York, got a yearlong sentence for allegedly violating her OOP. Her sole crime: photographing protesters (who subsequently were all acquitted) from Molloy Road’s shoulder. After a few months in Jamesville Penitentiary, Mary Anne won release pending appeal. If eventually her appeal fails, she’ll be re-incarcerated.

We’ve long lost track of the numbers, but well over 100 of our cases have been tried before either of the two elected part-time DeWitt Town justices, Robert Jokl Jr. or David Gideon. Those are mostly bench trials, in which a judge determines verdict and sentence; or, if involving misdemeanors, a six-person jury renders the verdict. In this court, not shy about doling out maximum sentences, juries are forbidden to hear what the max can be.

On the brink of a trial, the prosecutor may suddenly drop the misdemeanor charge, cleverly disrupting our defense prep. Jury trials in DeWitt are only occasional, since these burden the
court calendar and the town budget, while providing us the opportunity to testify about drone atrocity. In an arrest-happy time and place, law enforcement and the court prop up the ambient militarism, particularly where a community embraces its military base as a “job-provider.” Conveniently for stoking public buy-in, multitudes of redundant military installations are spread widely over congressional districts across the land.

Central New York is one of the nation’s major drone technology incubators, housing a branch of Lockheed Martin and SRC Inc., a defense research company. This gravy train seems to mesmerize local mainstream media, the Chamber of Commerce, nearby citadels of higher learning, and those of all political stripes dependent on government jobs and grants: co-optation broad and deep. Even liberal activists compartmentalized in their domestic issues shrink from acknowledging Hancock’s war crimes.

When we point out to police that war crimes occur just yards from where we’re being arrested, we hear, “It’s not our jurisdiction.” The court dismisses out of hand our International Law and Necessity defenses. Nor, of course, does it acknowledge that Hancock, in violation of the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, occupies Haudenosaunee Indigenous land. Note the historical continuity: most Reaper victims are themselves tribal or Indigenous people of color inhabiting formerly colonized but now nominally sovereign lands such as Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. All areas, it happens, the U.S. has yet to even officially declare war upon. Those Hellfire missiles – talk about trespass!

The disorderly conduct charge is bogus; as the base’s surveillance cameras attest, we treat everyone with respect and don’t resist arrest. (Before each demonstration, every participant signs a pledge of nonviolence.) Nor do our blockades discommode the public. The OGA charge is likewise bogus: trial witnesses, citing “security,” refuse to reveal
details of Hancock’s illegal and clandestine operations, which we call out and allegedly disrupt.

At trial, we defend ourselves pro se or with pro bono attorneys. Our lead attorney travels well over 300 miles from Long Island at his own expense. On the witness stand, we speak to what drone strikes do to human flesh, psyches and souls, and thus why we risk prison opposing brutality. We note that we don’t do civil disobedience — we do civil resistance. We don’t disobey law; we seek to enforce law — both U.S. and international. We observe the Nuremberg injunction that those aware of war crimes must try to expose and impede them — or else we would be complicit ourselves.

For the DeWitt court, international law is an alien concept. In many of this rogue nation’s law schools, international law apparently isn’t taught. U.S. superpower exceptionalism prevails. The Constitution’s First Amendment — which validates our right to petition the government for redress of grievances — is also alien.

In the early days, seeking to deter continued civil resistance, we were each customarily fined the maximum amount of $375, and some of us were also sentenced to 15 days in jail. In a further attempt to deter, the DeWitt judges — in apparent cahoots with the base — eventually conjured up those aforementioned Orders of Protection. Fortunately, suburban juries can’t always be counted on to find scrupulously nonviolent defendants guilty. Sometimes they find us not guilty on one or more counts, or the court feels compelled to dismiss a lackadaisically prosecuted charge.

Nowadays, the DeWitt court seems to be kicking the judicial can down the road. As I write in December 2019, our July 2018, June 2019 and September 2019 arrests have yet to be assigned trial dates. In DeWitt, New York, the notion that “justice delayed is justice denied” is quaint. This past summer, one judge, without explanation or apology, simply didn’t show up
for a motions hearing or to set a trial date. More recently, one evening’s judge told us, after we’d all traveled to a mandated court hearing, that our case wasn’t on that evening’s docket. Can it be that the validity of our cause is now dawning on the judges, making it hard to know what to do with us?

Reaper terror, first under Bush, increasingly under Obama, then far more under Trump, keeps escalating. We may never know if our efforts somehow slow the pace. But we do know that here in our backyard, if we don’t stand up and speak out against war crimes, it’s unlikely anyone else will. And we know that if no one speaks out, the Pentagon will keep operating as if it has a popular mandate to keep up the killing.

So we persist.

For video footage of Hancock actions, see upstatedronaction.org. For updates on our arrests and trials, see nukeresister.org. To glimpse the horror of weaponized drones, see the Stanford and NYU Law Schools’ joint 2012 report, “Living Under Drones.”

*Featured Image: An MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft flies by during a training mission at Creech Air Force Base on November 17, 2015, in Indian Springs, Nevada. ~Isaac Brekken / Getty Images

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Ed Kinane is a cofounder of the Upstate Drone Action Coalition. With Voices in the Wilderness in Baghdad in 2003, Kinane survived “Shock and Awe.” He has been jailed numerous times for civil resistance at Hancock and elsewhere. Reach him at edkinane340@gmail.com.
American Atrocities Continue To This Day

by Ed Kinane, Published in the Binghamton Press & Sun Bulletin, November 3, 2019


Later, conscience-stricken veterans publicly testified that My Lai wasn’t an “aberration” or the only GI massacre. Reports of other massacres emerged from other sources (especially the leaked “Pentagon Papers”).

These atrocities underpinned the demolishing of a distant impoverished land — one that had never threatened U.S. people, “interests,” or borders.

Sound familiar?

Fifty years later, run-amuck militarism remains very much with us. On March 19, 2019 a U.S. drone killed 30 Afghan pine nut harvesters gathered at night around a campfire. A further 40 were reportedly wounded in the attack.

This, too, was no isolated event. But in the 21st century, such increasingly high-tech killing has evolved and normalized. Across the Islamic oil lands – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia – U.S. robotic drones attack first responders, wedding parties and funeral processions. Hundreds of the innocent and unarmed are being killed, and thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, are being terrorized, spurring
waves of refugees.

Given the much-touted “precision” of the Hellfire missiles — a Lockheed Martin product — that these soulless operations deploy, can we call such massacres “mistakes”? Or excuse them as due to some mystical, unaccountable “fog of war”?

Hundreds of the innocent and unarmed are being killed, and thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, are being terrorized, spurring waves of refugees. When do U.S. taxpayers demand: stop the killing? When will we no longer tolerate a demented commander-in-chief and the demented Pentagon that generates such terror?

Ed Kinane, of Syracuse, spent five months in Iraq with the human-rights group Voices in the Wilderness before, during and after “Shock and Awe.” A My Lai Memorial Exhibit will be displayed at the Broome County Public Library from Thursday through Saturday.

Drones Fly, Children Die

by Judith Bello

Hancock Air National Guard Base was one of the first domestic drone bases to come on line. The base is located in a pleasant suburb of Syracuse New York, along side the International Airport. The 174th Attack Wing at Hancock is tasked with flying Reaper Drone missions over Afghanistan and other places on the far side of the world that they are unwilling to name. They also fly Drones berthed locally over the Adirondacks to the East and Lake Ontario to the West. I saw one 100 miles
west of there heading for Rochester International Airport one day. Hancock is the domestic center for training Reaper pilots and mechanics. The men of the 174th are proud of their work, which is important to the imperial U.S. international policing mission. At least in some cases, the human consequences of their work is not entirely clear to these men.

About a week ago, a small group of protesters went out to Hancock Air National Guard Base to exercise their civil rights and petition the government for redress of grievances. They believe that the use of hunter, killer Drones to attack people in countries we are not at war with, mostly countries that do not have the international status or military capacity to defend their people, is morally wrong and a violation of international consensus in general and international law. Further, they believe that the use of Drones piloted from the neighborhoods where we live and work endangers us in the long run.

**Video by Heriberto Rodriguez**

International law protects the rights of civilians. It also says that it is fair to retaliate against an attacker in the location where the attack is coming from. That would be Hancock, or more generally, Syracuse New York. Drone attacks rarely target anyone who is an immediate threat to the United States or countries at war with the U.S. They protect U.S. ‘Interests’ abroad. Drones attack people in their own lands, often in countries that are destabilized by competing foreign interests. Drone bombs take out anyone who happens to be in the same area as the target. Though the targeting is technically precise, it is often inaccurate due to misunderstanding of the actions of innocent people on the ground.

But ‘Why protest military Drones now?’ The United States is currently at war with Afghanistan (after nearly 18 years), has
a significant presence in Syria and Iraq and Yemen where it is engaged in proxy wars, and is threatening Venezuela and Iran very directly. The Russiagate enthusiasts and China-phobes are making plans for a ‘limited’ nuclear war and developing tools for a war in space that could isolate the earth from the rest of the universe for a very long time. Meanwhile, President Trump withdrew the United States from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia, which limits the development of medium range nuclear missiles. In early June, Russian President Vladimir Putin complained that the U.S. has been unwilling to engage in negotiations which must be completed by 2021 to renew the New START treaty which is the only remaining strategic nuclear arms control agreement in place between the United States and the Russian Federation. We are entering the world of Dr. Strangelove. The Atomic clock is a few seconds from midnight and global nuclear annihilation is now a serious risk.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

So, why devote ourselves to protesting military Drones? Well, I’ll get to the concerns that mobilized us in a minute. But first, the universe provided a perfect example of the significance of Drones in the above context a day or two before our protest. The Iranians shot down a U.S. surveillance drone over their coastal waters. It was a Global Hawk, large and expensive, but unarmed. Trump and the ‘B’ team (Bolton, BiBi, Bin Zayad, Bin Salman) immediately went into action, preparing a retaliatory strike. The Pentagon worked out a plan and initiated it. Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, choking off oil shipping in the region, and asserted that they would defend their sovereignty to a very bitter end. But, according President Trump, he called off the attack, 10 minutes before the strike because he was told there would be 150 casualties. If a U.S. attack were to trigger a larger war there might be tens of thousands of casualties,
including U.S. casualties.

Instead he called for new sanctions against individuals including sanctions against the Javad Zarif, a long time diplomat and peace maker who went to school in the U.S. and is very friendly to Americans, and Supreme Leader Khamenei, who does not have any assets outside of Iran. Since Iran is a relatively large country with an identity and history going back several millenia, and is very closely affiliated with Russia and China, starting a war over a piece of machinery would indeed have been a pretty stupid thing to do. But they didn’t, this time.

*Video by Heriberto Rodriguez*

There were a number of factors that motivated the protesters to go out to Hancock in June, and that wasn’t one of them. It was a total surprise. We haven’t heard much about Drones lately, until the Iranian shoot-down, but not because they weren’t in play. Military Drones are ubiquitous messengers of U.S. aggression. A friend who did several tours of duty in Iraq pointed out that they provided protection for the soldiers on the ground. Of course, we don’t have any soldiers on the ground in Libya, and supposedly, our soldiers in Iraq and Syria are keeping the peace, not engaged in open warfare. What soldiers are they protecting in the battlefields where U.S. soldiers are not supposed to be present on the ground?

Over the last couple of years, the Africom has built several large military bases across Africa to support a massive expansion of the Reaper drone fleet there. Currently, Somalia is a primary target. Somalia became a failed state the last time the U.S. tried to democratize them. Armed Drones fly routinely over Yemen, where they target al Qaeda, Islamists who are allied, with our proxy, Saudi Arabia. They fly over Iraq and Iran. Reapers continue to be the primary air force in Afghanistan. When you hear a report that 3 or 5, or 10 or 50
people were killed in an airstrike there, most likely it was a Reaper Drone strike. A 500 lb Paveway bomb will kill a lot of people in a wedding tent or at a town meeting or in a multi-family household, a compound, as they like to call it. Of course, this is just the way people live in Afghanistan, at least people who can afford a decent home.

Drones are deeply embedded in every U.S. warzone and area of military interest. Drones are used to seek out individuals where they live and work. Maybe they are bad people, or maybe they just appear to be the bad people. And usually, they are in the company of their families and friends, engaged in the normal activities of their community when the Drone catches up with them. Targeted assassinations often rely on a cellphone to identify the target, so don’t borrow anyone’s phone there, don’t walk in the store where a targeted individual is shopping. One man told me he sleeps in the mountains to protect his family. Heaven forbid someone should think he is home one night and take them all out while they are sleeping.

Signature Strikes, which target people who appear to be ‘acting like militants’, are still approved. So, men gathering for a meeting or emerging from their workplace, people praying after lunch along the roadside, schoolboys in a bus, people at a wedding firing their guns into the air, all might seem like good targets. The possibilities are endless when drone pilots who have never left the U.S. and never met anyone from Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, or wherever, and knows nothing about Islam. But at least our guys are safe over here.

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

Drones violate international law. You have probably heard that before. What does it mean to say that military Drone strikes violate International Law. It means that they tear the very fabric of global society. It means that those who fly them do
not feel constrained by the boundaries of nations or the rules of war. Drone warfare dehumanizes targets who are far away, and at least on the surface, appear to be more ‘enemies’ in a video game than humans living in society. The United States, having first launched a campaign of armed drones as weapons of war, is a role model for others coming on line, Russia, China and Iran. Israel pioneered Drones over the last decades, and also contempt for international law and the rights of other nations. Drones are consistently used against presumed ‘fighters’ who are not on a battlefield. Whatever war plans are in the making, Drones will be a central part of their enactment.

Now ‘unarmed’ Reapers are patrolling our borders. With the growing hysteria over illegal immigration, how long will they remain unarmed? ICE agents routinely check out the passengers on buses with dogs, and dust the baggage at train stations along the Canadian border for explosives. Drones have been used to target a couple of high profile criminals in this country. China and Russia, and even Iran now have their own military Drones. Armed Drones are not useful for dogfights, but they are very useful for policing. Just as in the interior of our cities, suspects are routinely killed to avoid risk and confusion, around the world suspects and anyone near them are routinely annihilated by hellfire missiles and Paveway bombs.

*Video by Heriberto Rodriguez*

Is this the world we want to live in? Members of Upstate (NY) Drone Action say no. And they put their bodies on the line to say it. If you want change, you have to do something about it. It is difficult to be heard these days, but its important to make the effort. If more people were to protest regularly in the name of peace and justice, it would become easier to be heard. Lots of people don’t like U.S. wars and interventions. But if you don’t come forward and put something on the line then your voice will be silent. Voting is a good idea, but so
few candidates oppose the wars that most people don’t have access to them. Donald Trump, of all people, ran as an advocate for withdrawing from the many ongoing U.S. wars around the world, but he seems to have forgotten now that he is in office. He has doubled down on military Drone use around the world. Obama ran as a peace candidate but he too presided over a huge increase in lethal Drone activity, the destruction of Libya and Syria and Honduras (to name a few), and the beginning of the Saudi war to occupy Yemen.

So, on the appointed day, we met at 6:45 with the items for our tableau, in the pouring rain and decided to go ahead anyway. Drones Fly; Children Die. War is an ugly and dark theme, why not roll it out in the rain. People set up the Tableau blocking the ingress lane of the road leading to the main gate at Hancock Field, and went to the Guard Shack to read the guards our complaint and ask them to forward it to the Colonel who is responsible for the Base. A soldier in a rain slicker immediately went into the main road to direct traffic to a different gate, and a lone policeman arrived. Sherri began chanting. She called out the names of some of the dead children killed in drone strikes. We joined her in a lament. Sherri and Peg chanted, sang and wailed through the entire event in the pouring rain, a couple of hours until the police took those practicing civil resistance to a holding pen in Onondaga County Jail.

*Video by Heriberto Rodriguez*

And all the while it rained and rained and rained. The rain poured down like tears from a universe where people’s lives are a matter of consequence.

The clips embedded in this article were taken from footage filmed by Heriberto Rodriguez, who somehow captured beautiful clean footage in the pouring rain, including nice cameos of activists stating their reasons for protesting at the base and
images of the vivid tableau in which they embedded themselves and the supporters across the street who held signs and chanted.

On June 20th 2019, 8 protesters outside the front gate of Hancock were arrested and charged with Trespassing and Disorderly Conduct, both violations, and Obstructing Governmental Action, a misdemeanor. They were Ann Tiffany, Ed Kinane, Dan Burgevin, Julianne Oldfield, Les Billips, Ray Kraemer, Mark Scibilia-Carver and Tom Joyce.

The False Narrative of Unmanned Drones and Trump’s Responsibility to Lead

by George Cassidy Payne, Published on Talker of the Town, June 24, 2019

The unmanned drone narrative is wrong. Someone is always operating these highly sophisticated killing/surveillance machines. Militarized drones may be maneuvered thousands of miles away by human pilots, but they are always being flown by someone. More to the point, they are being used by human beings to launch missile strikes that have killed at least 2,000 people since the beginning of Bush’s “War on Terror.”

Although estimates of civilian deaths attributed to drone strikes are notoriously difficult to establish, several courageous organizations have made it their mission to uncover the origin of these deaths so that the world can know what is
happening in places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. For instance, the New America Foundation has stated that from 2004 to 2011 alone, 15% of the 2,551 people killed by drone strikes were either known civilians or unknown. It has been widely reported that at least 150 children have been killed by militarized drones in Pakistan and that over 1,000 have been maimed or injured. Of course, these statistics say nothing about the extraordinary levels of PTSD inflicted on these populations. Civilian casualties from U.S. drone strikes

Whether someone agrees or disagrees with their use in combat, no one can effectively make the argument that these drones are in any way benign or innocuously unmanned. Whether equipped with weaponry or not, they represent the terrifying reality of American firepower and the severe cost of making the United States an enemy to be resisted. That is why they are flying above — or dangerously close to — the sovereign airspace of Iran. That is why Donald Trump authorizes their use every day. In fact, that is why the American president even went so far as to stop the mandatory reporting of civilian deaths and casualties due to drone strikes. (An act that reversed an Executive Order signed by Barack Obama in 2016.) What is more, that is why the United States military has been authorized by the American people to spend over 100 million dollars on a single piece of drone aircraft, which, we are learning, is the estimated cost of the one recently shot down by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

And that brings me to my second point. When that American drone was blown out of the sky, what an immense waste it truly was. I don’t mean a waste of insanely expensive technology. I mean, what an immense waste of potential to do good! What has a shot down airplane resulted in but further geopolitical brinkmanship, mutual distrust, and the growing likelihood of another costly and protracted war in the Middle East? And don’t try to tell me that drones are the only way that the
U.S. military and intelligence apparatus can attain footage of Iran’s nuclear program. That line of reasoning is absurd and outright mendacious.

I always wonder how that money could be spent differently to achieve better results. With that same amount of money, just imagine what could have been accomplished in the way of actually improving international relations between the two historic foes. If Trump really wants to “make Iran great again”, as he stated to Chuck Todd in his recent Meet the Press interview, then he must change how money is invested and the way he uses resources to make his presence and priorities known. Just think about it. 100 million dollars, even today, goes a long way in the arena of peacemaking. Examples abound from cultural exchange programs and humanitarian aid relief to joint commercial ventures and the lifting of economic sanctions. Even direct support of Iranian-American institutions and citizens and the sponsorship of diplomatic talks would, if allocated strategically, cost far less than 100 million dollars and open up the potential for hundreds of billions in new trade opportunities, regional stability, and scientific cooperation. During the Cold War, the Soviets still collaborated with the U.S. to achieve incredible feats of space exploration. To merely assume that Iran would refuse direct investment – not to mention one less drone in their airspace – is not rational.

Now, I do agree with Trump’s wise decision to restrain his military options after the drone was shot down. The fact that he is looking into other retaliatory options besides bombing Iranian civilians is a good sign that he has not completely lost his grip on reality and the responsibility he has to maintain global peace. But in general, Trump must be far more creative and proactive when it comes to Iran. He must realize that drones are not “unmanned” and that they represent to millions of people in the Middle East a horrific example of indiscriminate slaughter and omnipresent terror. It is, by any
calculation, a hugely expensive means for exacting political leverage. Whether or not they have been effective from a combat standpoint is a matter of academic debate, but there is no debating that the use of these weapons has destroyed thousands of lives in some of the most unethical acts of combat in military history. Morally speaking, the price we pay as Americans far exceed the 100 million dollar price tag that each of these vehicles comes with.

For all of these reasons, the time has arrived for President Trump to rethink everything about Iran, the use of force, and the cost of what some pundits call “hard diplomacy.” On a heart level, I ask myself: Why does Iran need to be a mortal threat to the national interests of America? That is not what the people of Iran want. That is not what the region, as a whole, wants. And, if Trump looks at this problem from a big picture perspective, that is not what has to happen, at least not if the U.S. is truly the leader of the free world. As such, we all have a choice. We can choose peace and prosperity or destruction and poverty. War is never inevitable, and the future can belong to those who truly believe that humanity is fundamentally alike and intrinsically good. It does not have to turn into a situation in which all sides pay a price that cannot be put into numerical form.

Photo by Lynda Howland

Come to think of it, Trump actually said something akin to this in his Meet the Press interview. To paraphrase, the U.S.
president said, “I am from NY. I know a lot of Iranians. They are good people.”

Yes, they are. That you are right about Mr. President. Because they are good people, the time is now to show the world that you can lead with thoughtful reflection on your own experience, resolute compassion for others (not in your base), and an honest desire to make people’s lives better because that is the sacred duty of the office you hold.

** Featured Image: Pilgrimage of Peace: Upstate Drone Action Walk to Educate Upstate NY about Drone Warfare

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8 Arrested Exposing Hancock AirForce Base Terrorism

by Ed Kinane, June 22, 2019

Shortly before 8 a.m. on Thursday, June 20, our Upstate Drone Action caravan of six or seven vehicles arrived, unannounced, at the main gate of Hancock AFB in De Witt, a suburb of Syracuse, New York. Two of us – accompanied by one of our videographers – proceeded to the guardhouse 50 yards in from East Molloy Road to read aloud and deliver a statement (below). The statement called on base personnel, in accordance with U.S. and International Law, to refuse to obey their chain of command’s illegal orders to commit what are ongoing drone war crimes.

Simultaneously we set about creating a street theatre tableau blocking the main entrance to the base. As we have many times over the past decade, we were calling out Hancock for hosting the 174th Attack Wing of the NY National Guard. The 174th
remotely pilots missile-spewing robotic MQ9 Reaper drones over Afghanistan (and probably elsewhere). These classified operations result in the terrorizing, maiming and killing of uncounted and uncountable numbers of unarmed and undefended children and their parents.

Until our arrest about two hours later, we held an unadorned, white 3×8-ft. banner across the driveway leading to the gate. In bold black letters, it read:

**DRONE FLY, CHILDREN DIE — OUR HEARTS ARE BREAKING.**

Nearby, also in the ingress, two grandmothers in traditional black dresses silently sat grieving, holding “infants” in bloodied swaddling clothes. Bloodied “body parts” and children’s toys and things were strewn about. Crossing back and forth between the banner and the road, pushed by a man in a cape and death’s mask, a model Reaper on wheels fleshed out the tableau. Across the road from base property, over a dozen supporters, singing and chanting, held signs like: **CHILDREN ARE NOT “COLLATERAL DAMAGE.”**

Two rain-soaked hours later, the DeWitt town police and Onondaga County sheriffs, having converged in numerous vehicles, ordered us to leave base property. Those eight who chose not to do so were arrested: Tom Joyce (Ithaca); Dan Burgevin & Mark Scibilia-Carver (Trumansburg); and Rae Kramer, Julienne Oldfield, Les Billips, Ann Tiffany and Ed Kinane (Syracuse).

We were handcuffed, separated by gender and taken in two paddy wagons to the sheriffs’ north station where we were held in three small cells. After a couple hours we were transported by van to the downtown Syracuse “Justice Center.” In booking we were ordered strip, spread our cheeks, and where applicable, lift our scrotums. Our street clothes were put in a device for what seemed to be some chemical inspection and replaced with
jail issue.

We were held in a chilly, dirty holding cell with other inmates all day. In the early evening we separately appeared before a Judge Murphy. Public defenders pled us not guilty. The assistant D.A. recommended we be ROR’ed and, released on our own recognizance, without bail. After being taken back to the holding cell, we were released — to the welcoming arms of support people and fellow perps — sometime after 10:30 p.m.

Five of us — LB, DB, TJ, EK, RK — must appear in the DeWitt town night court at 6 p.m. Tuesday, June 25; JO, AT & MS-C. must appear June 26, also at 6 p.m. We were each charged with two violations — trespass and disorderly conduct, and with a misdemeanor, obstruction of government administration (OGA). Thus far Hancock’s crimes against humanity go insufficiently exposed.

Thanks to our videographers our entire action was live-streamed. The arrest appeared on YouTube. The next morning brief footage appeared near the top of Amy Goodman’s “Democracy Now” news hour viewed by hundreds of thousands here and abroad. For a three-minute overview, check out:

Video by Heriberto Rodriguez

Arrest Video by John Amidon

*Featured photo by Heriberto Rodriguez
Drone Swarms Are Going to Be Terrifying and Hard to Stop

“Now the improvised explosive devices will find our war fighters.”

by Alexis C. Madrigal

Mar 7, 2018

One of the drones from a swarm that Russian military officials say attacked their air base in Syria. Russian Ministry of Defense

As regular people purchase more drones, the small, unmanned aerial systems keep dropping in price and growing in capability. Once expensive, under powered, remotely piloted toys with blink-of-an-eye battery life, consumer drones can now operate far more independently and for longer periods of time. They are nothing like the heavily armed fixed-wing drones such as the Reaper, which American forces have used to prosecute quiet wars across the world, but a new National Academy of Sciences report suggests that small, consumer-grade drones could be used in swarms to effectively attack American infantry with onboard bombs. “Contrary to the past, when U.S.
war fighters may have found improvised explosive devices, now
the improvised explosive devices will find our war fighters,”
the report concludes. While there have been occasional reports
of souped-up consumer drones used in military conflicts,
Russian military authorities said in January that a swarm of
fixed-wing drones, which were made of plywood and loaded with
explosives, attacked the country’s main air base in Syria. “More than a dozen armed drones descended from an
unknown location onto Russia’s vast Hmeimim air base in
northwestern Latakia province, the headquarters of Russia’s
military operations in Syria, and on the nearby Russian naval
base at Tartus,” The Washington Post reported. “Russia said
that it shot down seven of the 13 drones and used electronic
countermeasures to safely bring down the other six.” And these
drones appeared substantially less sophisticated and
maneuverable than a DJI Phantom 4, the leading consumer
drone. The National Academy notes that most of the counter
strategies that the Army has developed are “based on jamming
radio frequency and GPS signals.” The thinking was: Drones
needed those information flows to navigate effectively. Cut
them off and you neutralize the attack. But, as more decision-
making intelligence gets baked into groups of these systems,
those techniques will become less effective. “Recently
marketed sUASs [small unmanned aerial systems] have
technological enhancements (e.g., obstacle avoidance and
target-following technologies) that support autonomous flying
with no need for a control link or access to GPS,” the report
states. And “kinetic” defenses—that means bullets and
explosives—might also run into some problems with swarms of
tiny aircraft. “Kinetic counters, such as shooting down a
single, highly dynamic, fast-moving, low-flying hobby aircraft
with small arms (rifles, shotguns, and light machine guns),
are extremely difficult due to the agility and small size of
sUASs,” the report states. “Additionally, swarming sUASs can
be employed to overwhelm most existing kinetic
countermeasures.”
These militarily attractive features are why the United States
is working on massive drone swarms, too, and recent tests have
included dropping more than 100 robin-sized Perdix drones out
of two F/A-18 Super Hornets. The individual units then formed
into a swarming formation, as seen below.
The report that was released to the public is an abbreviation of a much more extensive report available to military officials, but even the public’s glimpse of the analysis demonstrates that small drones could be an important component of war from now on.

**Featured Image: 180322-N-GB257-002 Charleston, S.C. (March 22, 2018) Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center (SSC) Atlantic employee D.J. Tyree (seated at computer) launches an autonomous “swarm” of unmanned aerial vehicle’s (UAV’s) for a practice mission while fellow members of the SSC Atlantic Unmanned Systems Research (SAUSR) Range team; Chad Sullivan, Richard Kelly, Josh Carter and Brad Knaus look on and act as safety pilots. The SAUSR team is working with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to get autonomous technology in the hands of warfighters. SSC Atlantic develops, acquires and provides life cycle support for command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems, information technology and space capabilities. A leading-edge Navy engineering center, SSC Atlantic designs, builds, tests, fields and supports many of the finest frontline C4ISR systems in use today, and those being planned for the future. (U.S. Navy photo by Joe Bullinger/Released)

A Big Win for Faisal bin Ali Jaber and for Reprieve

UK ‘on notice’ after court rules Germany
Failed In Duty to Protect Innocent Civilians

Reprieve, March 19, 2019

A German court today ruled that the Government must do more to ensure its territory is not used by the US to carry out unlawful US drone strikes in Yemen. The case marks the first time a European country has been found to play an essential role in US drone strikes, with the Court holding that Germany’s role means it has a duty to protect the right to life of those being targeted.

Faisal Bin Ali Jaber, a Yemeni engineer, brought the claim with two of his family members, with help from Reprieve and ECCHR (European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights). Faisal’s brother-in-law, Salem bin ali Jaber, was an imam who preached against Al Qaeda just days before the US killed him and his nephew, Waleed, a policeman, in August 2012. Faisal’s relatives were offered a secret bag containing $100,000 in US dollar bills as compensation from Yemeni intelligence, but the US has never admitted responsibility.

In its decision, the Court acknowledged that Faisal and his family “are justified in fearing risks to life and limb from US drone strikes that use Ramstein Air base in violation of International Law”. Ramstein Air base provides the satellite relay infrastructure – without which drone strikes wouldn’t be possible.

It went on to state that there were “weighty indicators to suggest that at least part of the US armed drone strikes...in Yemen are not compatible with international law and that plaintiffs’ right to life is therefore unlawfully compromised.” The German Government’s declarations to the contrary, according to the court, were based on “insufficient fact-finding and ultimately not legally sustainable.” The Court also noted that the fact that Faisal and his family were
denied a judicial review by the American courts of their relatives’ deaths “runs counter to the idea that there were any [independent investigations by US authorities].”

The UK also facilitates the US drone programme. UK personnel have played a “crucial and sustained role” in the programme, with UK officials reportedly taking part in so-called “hits”, “triangulating” intelligence for targets lists, “tasking targets” via Menwith Hill, a base in Yorkshire, and by participating in a “joint operations room” with US and Yemeni forces in support of strikes.

The UK government has admitted that it works “with allies” to “negate the threat”, but has refused to answer further questions, including on what role UK bases are playing, the legal frameworks around intelligence sharing for such strikes, and whether any safeguards exist. Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights in 2016 raised concerns that the UK Government demonstrated a “misunderstanding of the legal frameworks that apply” to the use of armed drones outside of war zones and warned that UK support for the US programme could potentially expose ministers and others to risk of criminal prosecution.

Jennifer Gibson, Reprieve lawyer for Faisal bin ali Jaber, said:

“This is a ground breaking result. The court has made one thing very clear to Germany – they can no longer hide in the shadows and absolve themselves of responsibility for the innocent lives being destroyed by Trump’s illegal drone programme. The UK and other European countries are now on notice. They must hold President Trump to account and stop being complicit in these crimes.”

Faisal bin ali Jaber, said:

“I brought this case because I don’t want any other families
to suffer the way that mine has. Losing innocent family members, by mistake, to a US drone strike is something that no one should have to go through. The US drone programme could not function without support from European countries like Germany and the UK. It is long past time these Governments stepped up to prevent more innocent people being killed by US drones.”

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**Five Witness Against Torture Activists Arrested In Washington DC**

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

**Contact:** Kathy Kelly  773 619 2418
Brian Terrell  773 853 1886

**Five Witness Against Torture Activists Arrested for Bannering on the Supreme Court Steps as Part of “Stop Torture” protest**

January 9, 2019  ~Activists Participate in week long fast calling on the U.S. to Stop Support for the Murderous War in Yemen and Close the Prison Camp at Guantanamo

On January 9, 2019, five human rights activists protesting all forms of torture were arrested while bannering on the Supreme Court steps. Their banner stated:

“We Target. We Torture. We Terrify,” followed by the question
“Who Are We?”

Joining them were dozens of protesters who formed a tableau to denounce US-backed war on Yemen and call for closure of Guantanamo.

Alongside the banner, children’s bookbags were scattered atop bloodied shrouds. Each backpack bore the name of a Yemeni child killed on August 9, 2019 when a Saudi warplane fired a Lockheed 500 lb. missile at a school bus. Remembering nine prisoners who died in Guantanamo, activists clad in jumpsuits and hoods laid down on bloodied shrouds, across from the backpacks.

While Supreme Court security guards handcuffed those holding the banner, supporters sang:

“Know where you stand. No more war. Know where you stand and stand there.”

Explaining why she chose to risk arrest, Ellen Graves, a social worker from Western Massachusetts said she is troubled by grotesque practices that have starved, maimed, dismembered and traumatized Yemeni children. Graves and many of the other activists have gathered for a week of fasting and action that marks January 11, the seventeenth year since Muslim men have been imprisoned in Guantanamo. “The misery of Muslim people continues,” said Dr. Maha Hilal, after reading the names of the Yemeni children being commemorated along with the names of nine Muslim men who have died in Guantanamo.

Photo caption: Witness Against Torture activists demonstrate at Supreme Court

Photo credit: Steve Pavey

# # # #

Note: The five who were arrested (Joanne Lingle, Manijeh
Saba, Ellen Graves, Sherrill Hogen and Charley Bowman) will likely be held overnight and appear in court tomorrow. (Arraignments tend to happen at 1:00 p.m.) All best, Kathy

Voices Rising for Yemen – Final Day

Header and photos all from Voices for Creative Nonviolence

by Kathy Kelly, published on Voices for Creative Nonviolence, November 8, 2018

Over these past three days, Voices and a coalition of justice-minded organizations have been at and around the United Nations in New York City protesting the ongoing U.S.-Saudi attack on famine-imperiled Yemen. Details are available at www.vcnv.org along with next steps for people looking for ways to get involved. Participants Kathy Kelly, Brian Terrell, and Jules Orkin write here about the third and final day of protests:

VOICES RISING FOR YEMEN: FINAL DAY

We started our NYC activities this past Tuesday in soggy style, but yesterday, under brilliant sunny skies, the action became a moving procession. About 70 people formed a single file to carry backpacks, placards, signs bearing the names of children,
and various banners, past the U.S. Mission to the UN, past the Saudi Mission, and over to the consulate. Today we did the same, anticipating that those who stood in front of the consulate would be arrested.

By 11:30 this morning, on Dorothy Day’s birthday, about 90 people had gathered at the Isaiah Wall for a procession to the Saudi consulate. The mourning women led our march, garbed in large masks and veils, holding limp grey dolls that represent the thousands of children facing death in Yemen. Jun Sun and a companion followed, their drumbeats guiding us. Six people carried placards describing the terrible attack on a children’s schoolbus in northern Yemen. The attack happened on August 9, 2018.

This week in Yemen, children who had survived were going back for the first time to their classes, carrying their blue U.N. backpacks from the day of the attack, splattered with their classmates’ blood. So today in New York, people willing to risk arrest carried blue backpacks and signs naming the children who had been killed. Others followed with banners. Nick Mottern joined us with a drone replica, an apt reminder of U.S. aerial attacks and drone surveillance in Yemen.

Felton Davis and Ed Kinane held a banner and blocked the entrance to the U.S. Mission to the UN. They were later released without charge.
The procession continued past the Saudi Mission to the UN and over to the Saudi Consulate on Second Avenue. Members of our group swiftly set up a presence in front of three entrances to the building, urging people not to enter because it is too dangerous: criminal activities have been going on and all who have cause to be in the building should be aware of the crucial importance of ending the murderous, tortuous activities carried out by the Saudi government. Brian Terrell points out that, just as you would be concerned if office workers in your building were involved in human trafficking or drug smuggling, people should be alarmed over the Saudi government’s murderous practices as it makes war on Yemen. As Buddy Bell intoned the names of children killed on August 9 and raised a lament for Yemeni families, our response was “We Remember You.”

We sang and chanted for over two hours. At least two dozen police carrying plastic cuffs arrived, along with a NYPD Detective named Bogucki, who told us he recalled arresting some of us during the late ‘90s and in the years leading up to the Shock and Awe bombing in Iraq. From 1996 to 2003, we had protested the sacrifice and slaughter of Iraqi children. Detective Bogucki said we are preaching to the choir when we tell him about crimes happening inside the consulate, and other offices that prolong war in Yemen. Recognizing our complicity, we believe “the choir” must unite by resisting child sacrifice, child slaughter.

Word arrived from one of the blockade groups that the New York
Police Department had decided not to arrest anyone in our group. We eventually formed a circle, confirmed our collective determination to continue outreach, witness and resistance, expressed many thank yous, and dispersed.

Our hearts remain with Yemeni families agonizing over the dire plight of loved ones in Yemen. We thank Yemenis who have stood up, in more precarious settings, to call for an end to the fighting. And we look forward to supporting their calls for peace in every way we can, until this dreadful war is over.

Kathy Kelly interviewed outside the Saudi Arabian Consulate:

November 8th 2018 – protest gathered outside of Saudi Arabian Consulate in Midtown Manhattan, East 47th street and 2nd Ave. Protest spoke of Yemen bombing, deaths, Jamal Khashoggi, Trump and other issues. Large police response with various specialized units, carrying multiple zip ties and hand cuffs for the arrests. Click image to watch video. Full video and photos available oliya(at)scootecaster.com, www.scootecaster.com

November 8th 2018 – protest gathered outside of Saudi Arabian Consulate in Midtown Manhattan, East 47th street and 2nd Ave. Protest spoke of Yemen bombing, deaths, Jamal Khashoggi, Trump
and other issues. Large police response with various specialized units, carrying multiple zip ties and hand cuffs for the arrests.

*Kathy Kelly* is an American peace activist, **pacificist** and author, one of the founding members of *Voices in the Wilderness*, and currently a co-coordinator of *Voices for Creative Nonviolence*. She has traveled to Iraq twenty-six times, notably remaining in combat zones during the early days of both US–Iraq wars. Her recent travel has focused on Afghanistan and Gaza, along with domestic protests against US drone policy. She has been arrested more than sixty times at home and abroad, and written of her experiences among targets of US military bombardment and inmates of *US prisons*. 