

# 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*

---

# DRONE WARRIORS: Say Hello to the DoD's \$125,000 Ostrich Feather

by *Joe Scarry, cross-posted from Scarry Thoughts*

In ancient Egypt, there was a highly-developed idea of how to assess the deep meaning of thoughts and acts during life. “The critical scene depicting the weighing of the heart, in the Book of the Dead, shows Anubis performing a measurement that determined whether the person was worthy of entering the realm of the dead (the underworld, known as Duat). By weighing the heart of a deceased person against Ma’at (or “truth”), who was often represented as an ostrich feather, Anubis dictated the fate of souls.” (Wikipedia)

**The US Department of Defense has replaced the ostrich feather with \$125,000.**

A recent report in *The Fiscal Times* says the drone pilots are being induced to re-enlist with bonuses of \$125,000. Apparently, even though the military is moving as fast as it possibly can toward robotic killing, it still can't get the small number of people it needs to come volunteer and operate the controls. (“The service trained 180 new pilots in fiscal year 2014, while 240 retired, according to data provided to *The Los Angeles Times*.”)

The situation is likely to become especially dire, now that drone operators are coming forward and saying what many have been suggesting for a long time: it's not worth it.

Hey, we live in a free market economy, and some people think that means everything has its price. It shouldn't be surprising that the military thinks it can buy off drone operators.

The US government has done us a favor: they've said what they really think the conscience of a drone operator is worth.

Now it's up to us to do something about it.

---

# Reaper Madness: Obama's Whack-A-Mole Killing Machine

*Guest post by Doug Noble of Rochester Peace Action and Education. Originally published on Counterpunch Blog.*

*"Our entire Middle East policy seems to be based on firing drones," Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told The Intercept. "They're enamored by the ability of special operations and the CIA to find a guy in the middle of the desert in some shitty little village and drop a bomb on his head and kill him."*

Targeted killing by drones remains the US weapon of choice, famously called "*the only game in town*," by former CIA director Leon Panetta. This despite a decade of worldwide moral outrage over its overwhelming civilian casualties, violations of international law, disregard for national sovereignty, dismissal of due process, and continuing secrecy. The Obama administration recently announced that the drone killing program will in fact be increased by 50 % in the coming two years.

Now government documents leaked to the Intercept show conclusively that the US drone program kills thousands of innocents on bad intelligence and careless targeting while being falsely portrayed as a program of impeccable planning

and precision execution. The recently leaked "*Drone Papers*" reveal the extent of willful ineptitude in US drone operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, which rely on systematically faulty intelligence and astonishing inaccuracies in identifying targets. These revelations only further confirm what many of us already knew about the appalling failure, relentless deception and criminal lethality of the US drone program.

But it's even worse. Careless execution and public distortion are one thing. If the US were in fact relying on a proven military technology and strategy to defeat terrorists and "*keep America safe,*" despite setbacks and innocent lives lost, there are those who could justify the cost.

But what is perhaps most insidious of all is the fact that many studies long available to military planners have shown decisively that the use of weaponized drones in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts is both ineffective and counterproductive. Even more, the historical record and recent research shows quite clearly that the "decapitation" strategy driving such drone use – the assassination of high value targets – has itself been both unsuccessful and counterproductive in defeating insurgent or terrorist organizations.

So the drone warriors have known all along it wouldn't work: that killer drones and kill lists would slaughter thousands of civilians but never defeat terrorists. They've known this conclusively from decades of military experience and volumes of research studies. Yet they continue to do it anyway, ever more expansively, ever more mindlessly. Why? Because they can (and because they have no Plan B).

\*\*\*\*\*

Weaponized drones were in fact first proposed by the US military in 2000, prior to 9/11, as a means to both target and

kill, with the same aircraft, the Number One high value target, Osama Bin Laden. For this purpose, Predator surveillance drones were fitted with Hellfire missiles still available from the Gulf War. The name "Hellfire," an acronym for "heliborne-launched fire-and-forget missile," was originally designed as an "anti-tank guided missile (AGM)," somehow now redeployed for remote precision killing of individuals, or, as one Air Force article called it, "warhead to forehead."

These weaponized drones have been used ever since, as the weapon of choice in US operations all over the Middle East and North Africa. Now, given all the moral and legal controversy surrounding their use, some have begun to question if these weaponized drones have even been effective in defeating terrorists. As Los Angeles Times columnist Doyle McManus asked recently, "Are we winning the drone war?"

It's hard to know since, as a recent Stimson Center Task Force on US Drone Policy report explains,

*"after more than 10 years of use, the U.S. drone program remains so shrouded in secrecy that we do not have enough information to make an educated assessment of its effectiveness ... Without a clear understanding of the drone program's strategy, goals, and metric(s) used for evaluation, ... experts ... cannot make informed assessments regarding the program's efficacy."*

The Stimson Report observed that "on May 23, 2013, President Obama delivered a major speech at the National Defense University in which ... he pledged to continue the difficult task of ensuring that the use of lethal UAVs is .. strategically sound." The Report's authors recommend that the US government conduct a thoroughgoing evaluation of the impact of UAV strikes on terrorist organizations, with regard to capabilities, threats currently posed, morale and recruiting,



as well as their impact on public opinion, litigation, and defense policy." Nothing is expected to be forthcoming any time soon.

President Obama did provide a metric of drone effectiveness in a major speech in 2014: *"Our actions should meet a simple test: We must not create more enemies than we take off the battlefield."* Though hardly a robust definition of victory, even by this measure, given the growing numbers of new recruits in Al Qaeda, ISIS and other groups, it would appear that the US strategy has been decidedly ineffective. But since there are no clear numbers from the Obama administration of enemies killed and new recruits created, this metric of effectiveness is decidedly unhelpful.

Historical precedent and longstanding military doctrine, though, offer insight into the potential effectiveness of Obama's drone war. What follows is a brief sampling of conclusions drawn by research scholars, both within and without the military, who have examined the historical record and the military evidence. These scholars all agree that drone strikes are useless to defeat counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, but they all concede as well that the US military will continue into the future to rely on them anyway, as *"the only game in town."*

James A. Russell, a researcher at the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School, concludes in his article *"The False Promise of Aerial Policing,"* that

*"the idea of aerial policing is dangerous and deeply flawed, yet mysteriously it has become a panacea for states seeking to apply force in the modern era... Aerial policing is an intellectual and strategic house of cards built on shaky foundations ... [it] represents the triumph of tactics over strategy, turning fundamental truths about the nature of war on their head."*

Aerial policing grew out of theories of airpower that the airplane had revolutionized war by making it unnecessary for armies to clash on the ground and destroy one another. Instead, they argued, an opponent's armies, his means of waging war, and even his will to fight could be destroyed from the air via strategic bombardment. The conduct of this strike war, they argued, reduced operations and warfare to an engineering problem of identifying and striking targets.

World War II was the great laboratory to try out these ideas, as the United States and Britain sought to pound Germany into submission via strategic bombing. The lessons of the war for strategic bombardment, however, went unlearned. The allied bombers missed most of what they were aiming at, did not end Germany's means to wage war, and did not convince the German people to give up the fight.

The mythology of the airpower advocates endured through the Vietnam War, despite another failure of airpower to achieve strategic effect. More recently, America's special forces set about creating an insurgent targeting methodology that had its roots in the engineering approach employed by the airpower advocates. The targeting methodology was eagerly seized upon by airpower enthusiasts to assassinate suspected terrorists around the world with America's new generation of robots in the sky.

America's strategic retreat from Iraq and Afghanistan after 15 years is a monument to the failure of ... clever tactics championed by counterinsurgency advocates and their precise targeting methods. Yet America's response to this strategic failure has been to double down, showering more money and responsibility on the Special Forces and similar organizations that achieved no positive strategic effect in battle over the last 15 years.

James Igoe Walsh, U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, wrote a comprehensive article entitled, "The

Effectiveness of Drone Strikes in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism Campaigns". He concludes that

*"... drones are at most, weak substitutes for traditional counterinsurgency operations. While drones have the capability to punish and deter insurgent organizations, they do not alone contribute to the establishment of effective state authority in direct and meaningful ways, which ... requires large numbers of ground forces and civilians to provide services to, and gain intelligence from, the local population."*

The groups targeted by drones operate in areas where the United States and the [local] national government cannot or will not engage "on the ground" in large numbers. Drones are most useful in precisely such areas, since they allow the United States to project force when it and the national government have few other options

But the absence of boots on the ground makes it more difficult to gather human intelligence on the activities of militant groups that can be used to target drone strikes. Ungoverned spaces also can allow armed groups to proliferate and form complex and short-lived alliances that are difficult for outsiders to understand, increasing the challenge of targeting only militants who oppose the United States. Drones, then, are most useful for counterterrorism in precisely those settings where the challenges of counterterrorism are the greatest, and the ability to collect intelligence is the weakest. This means that the bar for the successful use of drones to counter terrorism is set quite high.... The evidence from the most sustained campaign to rely on drone strikes to deter and punish insurgent organizations in Pakistan suggests this technology has limited capacity to achieve these objectives. Despite these limitations, drone technology seems very likely to spread both within the U.S. Armed Forces, the armed forces of other countries, and even insurgent organizations.

Philosopher and historian Gregoire Chamayou, in his book, *A Theory of the Drone*, cites a 2009 op-ed by David Kilcullen, influential US military advisor on counterinsurgency, which called for a moratorium on drone strikes in Pakistan. Kilcullen viewed them as dangerously counterproductive, driving the population into the arms of extremists. Kilcullen drew direct parallels between the current drone program and the infamous failures of earlier French and British aerial bombardment campaigns in Algeria and Pakistan. He also opposed the technological fetishism of drone use, which *“displays every characteristic of a tactic – or, more accurately, a piece of technology, – substituting for a strategy.”*

Gregoire notes that *“air force strategists are well aware of the objections that [counterinsurgency] theorists never fail to raise, ...that what is being presented as a new strategy has already been tried out, with remarkably disastrous results.”* He cites in military doctrine the *“truism that COIN [counterinsurgency] is about boots on the ground and that airpower is counterproductive.”*

Gregoire observes, *“Dronized manhunting represents the triumph... of antiterrorism over counterinsurgency. According to this logic, the total body count and a list of hunting trophies take the place of a strategic evaluation of the political effects of armed violence. Successes become statistics.”* Never mind that drone strikes multiply new enemies. The strategic plan of drone counterinsurgency now seems to be that an armada of killer drones is capable of eliminating new recruits as fast as they are created: *“as soon as a head grows back, cut it off,”* in a pattern of ongoing eradication.

This assessment coincides with the Stimson report conclusion that *“the availability of lethal UAVs has fueled a ‘whack-a-mole’ approach to counterterrorism.”*

The whistleblower source for the Drone Papers concludes:

*“The military is easily capable of adapting to change, but they don’t like to stop anything they feel is making their lives easier, or is to their benefit. And this certainly is, in their eyes, a very quick, clean way of doing things. It’s a very slick, efficient way to conduct the war, without having to have the massive ground invasion mistakes of Iraq and Afghanistan. ... but at this point, they have become so addicted to this machine, to this way of doing business, that it seems like it’s going to become harder and harder to pull them away from it the longer they’re allowed to continue operating in this way.”*

\*\*\*\*\*

In addition to research on drone killings, some scholars have been researching the strategy underpinning US drone strikes, namely, the “*decapitation*” strategy (our own manner of beheading the enemy). This strategy assumes that the assassination of leaders and other key players – so-called “high value targets” (HVTs) – within an enemy insurgent or terrorist group will eventually defeat the group itself.

Scholars, though, come to the opposite conclusion.

RAND researcher Patrick B. Johnston, in his article “*Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns*,” notes:

*“Regardless of whether a government’s adversary is a state, a terrorist organization, or a guerrilla insurgency, the scholarly opinion has been that high-value targeting is ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. The data also show conclusively that killing or capturing insurgent leaders is usually not a silver bullet, since governments were only around 25% more likely to defeat insurgencies following the successful removal of top insurgent leaders.”*

In his review of the relevant literature, "*The ABCs of HVT: Key Lessons from High Value Targeting Campaigns Against Insurgents and Terrorists*," Matt Frankel of the Brookings Institution, concludes:

*"The final implication for the United States is that it is vital that any HVT campaign take place as part of a larger strategy, not merely as an end to itself. Remote strikes and targeted raids need to be combined with broader operations, both military and non-military, to achieve maximum effectiveness.*

*The United States will face an uphill battle in utilizing HVT campaigns successfully, since it will always be operating as a third-party force. If the goals of the host government and the third-party force are divergent, there is little chance for success.*

*It is clear that as long as Al Qaeda remains a global force, U.S.-sponsored HVT operations will continue. But if the United States continues to conduct HVT operations in a vacuum, ...it will continue to be doomed to failure."*

Professor of International Affairs Jenna Jordan, concludes in her article "*Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes*"

*"The targeting of terrorist leaders affiliated with al-Qaida has been the cornerstone of U.S. counterterrorism policy since 2001. ..Targeting al-Qaida is not likely to result in organizational decline or long-term degradation [since] its bureaucratic organization and communal support have allowed it to withstand frequent attacks on its leadership."*

However, she cautions,

*"Regardless of the effectiveness and potential for adverse consequences of its decapitation strategy, the United States*

*is likely to continue targeting al-Qaida leaders because U.S. policymakers view the killing of high-level targets as successes in themselves."*

## **Conclusion**

The publication this year of the Drone Papers reveals that the Obama administration, the US military, and the CIA have been lying all along about the drone assassination program, its targets and its civilian casualties. These documents also expose the obscene disregard for human lives pervading the entire operation, as the drone warriors pursue their technological dreams. *"Throughout human history,"* the Stimson Report reminds us, *"the ability to project force across significant distances has been a much sought-after military capability... and since the dawn of mechanization, militaries have sought to replace people with machines."* In this context, drones are the unholy grail. The Drone Papers reveal that in its pursuit these Dr Strangeloves have been well aware of the horrific human costs of their enterprise and that they couldn't care less. □

What I've tried to show here is something more: that these military miscreants have also known all along that their drone technology and targeting strategy are militarily bankrupt. They could not but be aware from military history and doctrine that these approaches have absolutely no possibility of defeating terrorist groups or keeping America safe. They must know that in fact the opposite is true, that their nefarious enterprise only further endangers us all. And yet they will continue ever more brazenly their Reaper madness, the scholars here all agree, until we find some way to stop them.

---

## **References**

Recommendations and Report of the Stimson Center Task Force on

US Drone Policy, Second Edition. Research Director: Rachel Stohl, April 2015

Rachel Stohl, "Just how effective is the US drone program anyway?"

Doyle McManus, "Are we winning the drone war?" *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 2015

Patrick B. Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," *International Security*, 36(4):47-79, 2012

Frankel, Matt(2011) 'The ABCs of HVT: Key Lessons from High Value Targeting Campaigns Against Insurgents and Terrorists', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 34: 1, 17 – 3

Jenna Jordan , "Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes," *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Spring 2014), pp. 7–38,

Gregoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, The New Press, 2015

Richard Whittle, *Predator: The Secret Origins of the Drone Revolution*. Henry Holt & Co., 2014

Andrew Cockburn, *Kill Chain: The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins*, Henry Holt & Co., 2015

Jeremy Scahill et al., *The Drone Papers*.

---

**Medea Benjamin Speaks at**



# Hallwalls

Undrone Upstate Walkers Rally at Niagara Fall Air National Guard Base With Medea Benjamin, then head into Buffalo to hear her speak.

A rapper named Alex started off the show with some great music. Then Russell Brown of the Undrone Upstate Walkers spoke, followed by Medea. I made the audio recording of their presentations which follows. There will eventually be a video, but if you just want to hear what was said, listen to the recordings below.

<http://upstatedroneaction.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/Audio/Rapper-10-20-20-Buffalo.mp3>

**Alex calls for Peace.** He did a song before this, but I missed most of it while fiddling with my phone to get it set up.

<http://upstatedroneaction.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/Audio/Russell-Undrone-Upstate.mp3>

## **Russell Talks about Undrone Upstate**

<http://upstatedroneaction.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/Audio/Medea-UU-10-20-15.mp3>

## **Medea Benjamin's Talk**

---

# **The Metastaticizing US Military**

# Drone Program

*This post by Judy Bello is cross-posted from The Deconstructed Globe*

It was never in doubt that the US has expanded its military drone program continuously, at least since 2001, and continues to do so. Not only have the numbers of active, armed Predators and Reapers increased, but continuing research and development have yielded larger, faster drones capable of carrying more armaments, better video feeds, and more security. Smaller drones that can go unnoticed with the capacity to obtain visual or audio information, or deliver a small weapon, say a poison dart are also under intensive development..

Additionally, military industrial complex has worked, at least since I last went to a trade show 7 years ago, on technologies to create fleets of drones with a central command or lead drone (with redundancies that make it replaceable in real time from within the grouping) that act together like a flock of birds. This technology will provide automated networking for information sharing and coverage of specified areas with a group of drones, small or large.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which has a comprehensive section investigating the use of military drones, has reported on the expanding use of Predators and Reaper drones for months. A number of new military drones are about to come on line, and the number in use will increase. Within the last few days, numerous mainstream venues have published articles on this subject. In an article on the World Socialist Web Site, Niles Williams quotes the following information from the latest article on the subject in the Wall Street Journal:

*... the number of daily flights will increase by 50 percent from the current 61 to as many as 90 a day by 2019.*

*... drone killing and spying operations will be expanded to include missions carried out by the Army, Special Operations Command as well as government contractors.*

*... expansion of the drone program will be directed at improving surveillance and intelligence gathering operations in Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, the South China Sea and North Africa.*

*The growth of the fleet and the number of flights will also be accompanied by a growth of the program's capacity for carrying out killings via airstrikes.*

-----

I saw this coming a couple of years ago while the US was pulling a temporary veil over the drone program following prominent criticisms from international Human Rights NGOs and a critical report by a specially appointed United Nations Rapporteur, all of which raised serious questions about the legality and morality of the program.. For a while, there were less Hellfire missile strikes reported and the conversation turned to the possibilities of Amazon drone delivery and random Octocopter sitings. Domestic activism focused on attempts to bar drones from the airspace of local communities. Meanwhile, the plotters were in the War Room plotting and the factories at BAE, Lockheed Martin, Honeywell and General Atomics.

Today I received a request to comment on some excellent questions about the planned escalation of the U.S. military drone program, which spurred me to do a little writing on the subject. These are serious questions, important questions, but in the current climate of military dominance, they struck me as strangely absurd. As such, I found myself compelled to answer them as you can see below.

**What do I think about the Pentagon's decision to expand this**

## **program?**

Most likely there is a plan to offset any global economic setbacks with brute force and a monopoly on certain types of information useful for terrorizing populations that don't have access to resources while blackmailing governments that are a threat to U.S. hegemony and bribing those that need a little help holding power. This is nothing new in the most general sense. More immediately, a global network of military drones conducting reconnaissance and able to strike at any time might reflect an attempt to create a global fait accompli. An automated network of control deployed over international waters and disputed territories around the globe, deployed before anyone has the capacity to block it, would make it possible to use military might to enforce U.S. hegemony around the globe as a policing action.

Plans utilizing a combination of special ops and drones are not easily adapted to any goal other than assassination and possibly 'herding' – in other words, moving populations on the ground using coordinated threats. This is important because dominance is assumed rather than acquired (say, by treaty or by war). I.E. this is not a plan to win a war. Drones are uniquely adapted for policing. The neocons (and their neoliberal cousins) are once again dreaming big! They want to skip the war and assume control – they see it as their destiny.

## **Is this increase necessary for US national security?**

Of course this expansion isn't necessary for U.S. national security, unless of course, you view the U.S. nation as spanning the globe. It might decrease U.S. national security in a world where computer technology is essentially impossible to fully secure.

## **What does this decision indicate?**

This decision indicates increased impunity on the part of the

largest and most widely engaged military on the face of the earth. It also indicates a pattern of increasing reliance on technology supplanting human interaction and intelligence.

It might indicate that the U.S. government and its corporate masters are getting ready to go for the gold. Chaos is spreading through the global economy for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that an artificial system of continual growth within a closed system (like the earth) is impossible. The hegemony of the dollar is now threatened by reckless attempts to resolve inconsistencies in the system through monetization and by emancipatory initiatives taken by other nations through external multilateral trade agreements grounded in local currencies. Diplomatic initiatives to rope U.S. allies into coercive treaties like the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) are meeting significant resistance. Meanwhile, these guys aren't going to live forever so if they want to rule the world they will have to move soon.

### **What does the past expansion indicate?**

The past expansion of military drone activity indicates a period of development and testing of a new technology and the unveiling of a new paradigm for world domination.

**The advantages and disadvantages** of this strategy tend to be relative to the observer. From the ground and from the perspective of other independent states, one would think that just the intention behind of this kind of policy is rather threatening. It is a threat to the rule of law, to national sovereignty and democratic aspirations, and to the security of ordinary people on the ground everywhere. On the other hand, since it is not a plan to win a war how should the sovereign nations of the world respond? Might they go to war against the largest most broadly based military power in the world? They are already forced to defend themselves in a number of regional disturbances. Can they use economic independence to secure their sovereignty against this threat?

This is a plan to hold ground, to control resources and to manage those who might interfere. Because it isn't yet fully operational, they have options. They could try to join the force and secure their future through collaboration. (notably, Israel and Saudi Arabia) They might begin to build regional economic networks and collaborate among themselves to build an empowered political network to resist this intrusion through a variety of diplomatic and other means. (China, Russia) Individuals can go mad with rage or defiance and join any one of a number of active organizations that provide opportunities for self empowerment through notably regressive and barbaric actions on the ground. (ISIS, al Qaeda) They get a lot of good press for this kind of activity and if you were not a thinking person you might assume that you can rule the world without air power.

From the U.S. perspective, the military will not save money because so many people are involved in the process, technicians, observers, pilots, with managers and decision makers at many levels similar to corporate decision making procedures. But, as long as the cash is flowing there is profit to be made. This kind of process is messy and slightly randomized so that the job gets done with a lot of spillover and wasted resources. Like machine generated software, it may work (do something) but the logic isn't clean and there is a lot of redundancy making it difficult for humans to decipher. As in other processes borrowed from the corporate sphere, there is a goal to take human intelligence out of the picture and use social processes to make individuals redundant. This keeps them from getting in the way. It also lowers the unique significance of individual workers at all levels and disperses responsibility among individuals so there is no where for the proverbial 'buck' to stop.

Drones are slow and fragile compared to war planes. But, if you aren't in a war and you are targeting people and things on the ground, no problem. Individual drones are much cheaper

than war planes, and don't require an on-board pilot, so they are relatively disposable. It is the process that is expensive, and that is not vulnerable at the site of the action.

There are some disadvantages inherent in a technical solution based on computers and data transmission. These activities are not innately secure. Currently, the U.S. is utilizing this feature of computer/internet technology to brazenly spy on anyone and everyone. But, there are brilliant hackers and security experts in the field who might, due to national loyalty, moral judgement or the sheer joy of the chase, cause some serious problems for this system, or in fact, co-opt it completely to own purpose. When decision makers are reliant on a technology they don't fully understand, there are risks. The use of mercenaries creates risks.

**What are the possible consequences of this drastic expansion of the drone program?**

**The probable consequences are:**

- a lowering of the mean status of military recruits with more and more jobs filled by non-commissioned personnel sitting in trailers, computer labs and fabric demarcated cubicles staring at computer screens and taking orders from managerial specialists who show up on video feeds.
- Drone pilot teams become glorified line workers whose purpose is to kill other people,
- Lots of dead and traumatized innocents around the globe
- U.S. citizens living in the homeland find themselves under the same kind of drone surveillance and risk of targeted killing as people around the world;.

**Some possible consequences are**

- a world dominated by a network of US military drones of all sizes and shapes making resistance, if not 'futile', certainly very dangerous.

- other countries of the world finally rise up to set international standards of behavior that are appropriate for human survival.
- Ongoing processes like the shift of the global economy away from the dollar, global warming and other effects of pollution and tampering with natural processes for corporate profit make unipolar drone policing moot;
- World War III triggered by global efforts to retain national sovereignty,

**Is there another way to get the intelligence these drones will provide?**

You must be kidding! We have satellites overhead nearly everywhere nearly all the time. In fact, the drones depend on these satellites for orientation and communications. We should have informants on the ground. if we don't it is due to a unique combination of arrogance and cultural ignorance commonly known as *American exceptionalism*.

Meanwhile, killing suspects and anyone else in the neighborhood is against US Law, International Law and morality, Flying armed drones on Russia and China's borders sets up an accident waiting to happen. So, whatever the intent of these actions is, there ought to be a better way. Diplomacy comes to mind. But, that isn't the strong suit in the US *Game of Thrones*.

---

# **Taking Responsibility for**



# Drone Killings

## **Taking Responsibility for Drone Killings *President Obama and the Fog of War***

*by Brian Terrell, reprinted from Voices for Creative  
Nonviolence*

When President Barack Obama apologized on April 23 to the families of Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto, an American and an Italian, both hostages killed in a drone attack in Pakistan in January, he blamed their tragic deaths on the “fog of war.”

“This operation was fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts in the region,” he said, and based on “hundreds of hours of surveillance, we believed that this (the building targeted and destroyed by drone launched missiles) was an al Qaeda compound; that no civilians were present.” Even with the best of intentions and most stringent of safeguards, the president said, “it is a cruel and bitter truth that in the fog of war generally and our fight against terrorists specifically, mistakes – sometimes deadly mistakes – can occur.”

The term “fog of war,” *Nebel des Krieges* in German, was introduced by the Prussian military analyst Carl von Clausewitz in 1832, to describe the uncertainty experienced by commanders and soldiers on the battlefield. It is often used to explain or excuse “friendly fire” and other unintended deaths in the heat and confusion of combat. The term raises vivid images of chaos and ambiguity. Fog of war describes incredible noise and trauma, volleys of bullets and artillery shells, bone jarring explosions, screams of the wounded, orders shouted out and countermanded, vision limited and distorted by clouds of gas, smoke and debris.

War itself is a crime and war is hell, and in its fog soldiers can suffer from emotional, sensory and physical overload. In the fog of war, fatigued past the point of endurance and fearful both for their own lives and for those of their comrades, soldiers must often make split second decisions of life and death. In such deplorable conditions, it is unavoidable that “mistakes – sometimes deadly mistakes – can occur.”

But Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto were not killed in the fog of war. They were not killed in war at all, not in any way war has been understood until now. They were killed in a country where the United States is not at war. No one was fighting at the compound where they died. The soldiers who fired the missiles that killed these two men were thousands of miles away in the United States and in no danger, even if anyone were firing back. These soldiers watched the compound go up in smoke under their missiles, but they did not hear the explosion nor the cries of the wounded, nor were they subjected to the concussion of its blast. That night, as the night before this attack, it can be assumed that they slept at home in their own beds.

The president attests that those missiles were fired only after “hundreds of hours of surveillance” were carefully studied by defense and intelligence analysts. The decision that led to the deaths of Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto was not reached in the crucible of combat but in the comfort and safety of offices and conference rooms. Their line of sight was not clouded by smoke and debris but was enhanced by the most advanced “Gorgon Stare” surveillance technology of the Reaper drones.

The same day as the president’s announcement the White House Press Secretary also issued a release with this news: “We have concluded that Ahmed Farouq, an American who was an al-Qa’ida leader, was killed in the same operation that resulted in the deaths of Dr. Weinstein and Mr. Lo Porto. We have also

concluded that Adam Gadahn, an American who became a prominent member of al-Qa'ida, was killed in January, likely in a separate U.S. Government counterterrorism operation. While both Farouq and Gadahn were al-Qa'ida members, neither was specifically targeted, and we did not have information indicating their presence at the sites of these operations." If the president's drone assassination program sometimes accidentally kills hostages, it also sometimes accidentally kills Americans alleged to be members of al-Qa'ida and apparently the White House expects us to take some consolation in this fact.

"Hundreds of hours of surveillance" notwithstanding, and despite being "fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts," the order to attack the compound was given in the absence of any indication that Ahmed Farouq was there or that Warren Weinstein was not. Three months after the fact, the United States government admits that they blew up a building that they had been watching for days without the slightest idea who was in it.

The "cruel and bitter truth" is actually that Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto were not killed in a "counterterrorism effort" at all, but in an act of terrorism by the United States government. They died in a gangland style hit that went awry. Killed in a high-tech drive-by shooting, they are victims of negligent homicide at best, if not of outright murder.

Another "cruel and bitter truth" is that people who are executed by drones far from a battlefield for crimes they have not been tried for or convicted of, such as Ahmed Farouq and Adam Gadahn were, are not enemies lawfully killed in combat. They are victims of lynching by remote control.

"Predators and Reapers are useless in a contested environment," admitted General Mike Hostage, chief of the Air Force's Air Combat Command in a speech in September, 2013.

Drones have proven useful, he said, at "hunting down" al Qa'ida but are no good in actual combat. Since al Qa'ida and other terrorist organizations have only flourished and multiplied since Obama's drone campaigns took off in 2009, one might take issue with the general's claim for their usefulness on any front, but it is a fact that the use of lethal force by a military unit outside of a contested environment, outside of a battlefield, is a war crime. It might follow that even the possession of a weapon that is useful only in an uncontested environment is a crime, as well.

The deaths of two western hostages, one an American citizen, are indeed tragic, but no more so than the deaths of thousands of Yemeni, Pakistani, Afghan, Somali and Libyan children, women and men murdered by these same drones. Both the president and his press secretary assure us that the events in Pakistan last January were "fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts," business as usual in other words. It seems that in the president's view, death is only tragic when it is inconveniently discovered that western non-Muslim people are killed.

"As President and as Commander-in-Chief, I take full responsibility for all our counterterrorism operations, including the one that inadvertently took the lives of Warren and Giovanni," said President Obama on April 23. From the time President Ronald Reagan took full responsibility for the Iran-Contra arms deal to the present, it is clear that a presidential admission of responsibility means that no one will be held accountable and that nothing will change. The responsibility that President Obama accepts for only two of his victims is too paltry for consideration and, along with his partial apology, is an insult to their memories. In these days of governmental evasions and official cowardice, it is crucial that there are some who do take full responsibility for all of those killed and act to stop these acts of reckless

and provocative violence.



## **Taking Responsibility for Drone Killing At Beale AFB, California**

Five days after the president's announcement of Weinstein's and Lo Porto's murders, on April 28, I was privileged to be in California with a dedicated community of activists outside of Beale Air Force Base, home of the Global Hawk surveillance drone. Sixteen of us were arrested blocking the entrance to the base, reciting the names of children who have also been killed in drone attacks but without a presidential apology or even, for that matter, any admission that they died at all. On May 17, I was with another group of anti-drone activists at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri and in early March, in the Nevada desert with more than one hundred resisting drone murders from Creech Air Force Base. Responsible citizens are protesting at drone bases in Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, New York at RAF Waddington in the United Kingdom, at the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, at the White House and other scenes of these crimes against humanity.

In Yemen and in Pakistan, too, people are speaking out against the murders taking place in their own countries and at great risk to themselves. Lawyers from Reprieve and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights have filed suit in a German court, charging that the German government has violated its own constitution by allowing the U.S. to use a satellite relay station at Ramstein Air Base in Germany for drone murders in Yemen.

Perhaps one day President Obama will be held responsible for these murders. In the meantime, the responsibility that he and his administration shirks belongs to all of us. He cannot hide behind a fog of war and neither can we.

---

## German Activist Confronts Foreign Minister Over Drones



Activist Elsa Rassback and German Foreign Minister Steinmeier

German activists are engaged in drone resistance around US Ramstein base which houses a critical repeater that is necessary for drone strikes in West Asia and Africa. Ramstein has been a critical asset to US wars since the US occupation of West Germany after World War II. Now it's drone control. There are a number of things going on in German resistance at present.

ECCHR, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, is arguing a lawsuit against Germany on behalf of Yemeni citizens whose relatives were killed in drone strikes. The issue is that Germany is supporting the US base at Ramstein where there is a repeater that makes US drone

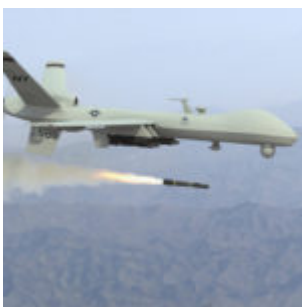
strikes in West Asia and Africa possible. The ask is for Germany to make the US remove the repeater at Ramstein and not allow it to be replaced on German soil.

So they aren't asking for transparency and explanations but rather the cessation of German support for US drone strikes. The German government has been hiding the facts on this issue and denying responsibility. However, the truth is documented on the Intercept, which ran a great article by Jeremy Scahill on the case a week ago. They will have to confront their complicity in a program of targeted killing and random murder of civilians around the globe.

German American activist Elsa Rassbach had the good fortune to run into Foreign Minister Steinmeier at a function recently, where she share with him a little piece of her mind. Good Going Elsa!

---

## Export of Armed Drones Approved



The United States government has just eased regulations on selling drones to other countries. According to the New York Times, *"The Obama administration is amending its regulations for weapons sales to allow the export of armed military drones to friendly nations and allies."* In a later article they say that State Department Officials say *"sales must be made through government programs and that recipient nations must agree to certain 'end-use assurances.'"* However, one of

the issues that triggered this is loss of contracts from Israel by armed drone manufactures. Israel uses armed drones to police the border and prosecute wars against the people of Gaza.

The first reference that came up was in Al Jazeera. After that there was UNB (Bangladesh), Ntv (India), Dawn (Pakistan), New Europe (EU), WN, (Australia), and more.

Many countries are interested in this opportunity. According to an Editorial in *Barchart*, a Wall Street Blog, 3 Defense Stocks Ride on New Armed Drone Policy. Of course, the money guys are excited about this policy change as well. The policy itself is a response to demands by General Atomics (maker of Reaper and Predator drones), Northrup Grumman and other manufacturers of armed drones who felt they were losing out on lucrative contracts while Israel, China, Russia and others are developing weaponized drones and entering the market.

Now, when you read that the US will be selling armed drones to our friends and allies, you probably think 'England, France, Germany . . . ', our old friends. Leaving aside the fact that one of these countries was the central opponent in the last world war, whose leadership from that period remain the archetype for evil in international dealings, the fact is that our allies include the Gulf Emirates including Qatar, which is the publisher of Al Jazeera, NATO ally Turkey and Saudi Arabia. These latter countries are governed by conservative regimes that are supporting the Islamist insurgencies and driving much of the violence in the Greater Middle East from Lebanon to Pakistan. Will we sell them armed drones?

Perhaps there remain some restrictions on selling armed drones. But, we are opening Pandora's Box, and when we will find the bottom, no one can know. One thing is certain, all the demons will fly out first.



For another Upstate Drone Report on this subject, read Mickie Lynn's latest blog post in the Albany Times Union, Armed Drones for the World, What a Brilliant Idea!

---

# 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.

---

## **Drone damage causes pilot's to quit**

Drone damage causes pilot's to quit:

“Killing during the day and going home at night”

Nick Mottern on "In the Now on RT, January 21, 2015