

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

by **George Cassidy Payne**, Published on **Talker of the Town**,
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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*

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\(at\)scootercaster.com](mailto:oliya@scootercaster.com), www.scootercaster.com

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Kathy Kelly is an American peace activist, pacifist 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.

Terrorism is Killing or Instilling Fear – No Matter Who Does It

We watch proliferating terror and violence. . . Mourning and fear come too. What's the remedy? More of the same?!

Peacemakers on retreat were playing a game where the caller, standing in the middle of a circle of seated people says, "The Big Wind Blows on anyone who . ." All for whom it's true – including the caller – must find another seat. The person left standing is the next caller.

My friend said, "The Big Wind Blows on anyone who has ever been part of a Terrorist Organization." I was shocked. Why did he ask that? And was the room bugged? Would the FBI, who bugs peace groups, think that meant we're terrorists? Why would he ask that?

Since I wasn't the only confused-looking person, he said, "Well, I was part of a terrorist organization: the U.S. military."

The Buffalo News said in its December 4 headline story "Massacre again raises question of when to define it as terrorism,"

Federal law defines terrorism as dangerous acts intended to intimidate a civilian population, influence government policy

or affect government conduct "by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping."

Some examples are

- our weaponized drone program, where, per Intercept based on leaked U.S. internal documents, nearly 90% of those killed were not the intended targets (assassination, mass destruction and community intimidation included);
- night raids in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, which terrify surprised families and whole communities. War is state terrorism.
- "policing" murders, especially of black people. People of color, activists, and innocents know and are highly intimidated because even moving (Amadou Diallo); questioning (Sandra Bland); or failing immediate obedience (12-year-old Tamir Rice) – could result in one's getting killed.

Terrorism is killing and/or instilling fear. Let's kill the people who are killing people? Which causes more people to kill? How can that work? It doesn't make sense. (Don't hit your sister. *Whap!!*) Restraining and preventing aggression is necessary. Instilling fear and Islamophobia promote a police state.

The U.S. treatment of whistle blowers confirms governmental intimidation. Hero Edward Snowden caused policy improvements, yet he faces espionage charges. Drone pilots revealing program truths have had their bank accounts and credit cards frozen. Police have generally been protected from charges of murder, wrongful death, or brutality until quite recently. State violence is excused.

State terrorism is still terrorism, and like violence, Terrorism begets more Terrorism. In fact, besides our government's above-described intimidation of civilian populations, the U.S. efforts to influence other governments'

policies and/or affect their conduct are well known worldwide. The Project for the New American Century espoused our challenging policies or conduct of other governments that are not aligned with our interests and prominence.

Do we need more or less violence? Hope we can agree we need less.

We need faith, courage, and resolute adherence to principle. Let's work cooperatively, fearlessly, to mainstream nonviolence, including petitioning our government. You can join organizations like the WNY Peace Center and allies on specific campaigns.

Victoria Ross, QCSW, LMSW, MALD, is the Executive Director of the WNY Peace Center, a consultant for the Interfaith Peace Network, and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church's delegate to the Network of Religious Communities (all cosponsors of the Solidarity Rally along with Muslim Public Affairs Council, and 40 other groups).

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 Walk ers

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-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