

Drone Activist Responds to the NY Times OpEd on Drones

On MARCH 16, 2017 the New York Times published an Editorial “Preventing a Free-For-All With Drone Strikes” where they express belated concerns about the US Drone program of Targeted Killing around the globe. Our organization has been educating people about the drones since 2010. We have engaged in a Gandhian Wave of civil resistance at Hancock Air National Guard Base, a domestic Reaper Drone hub, wherein many have been arrested many times, including Ed Kinane. Here is Ed’s response to the NY Times.

“Preventing a Free-for-All With Drone Strikes”

Oh, so now that others are acquiring weaponized drone technology, it’s become time for a re-think?

“For nearly a decade, drone strikes have been central to America’s counterterrorism policy. Operated from remote locations,”

Or, more precisely, from U.S. military bases: both here and abroad.

“the small aircraft can hover over targets for long periods of time and kill extremists”

Allegedly kill alleged “extremists.” Very slippery word. Who is “extreme” and who gets to define who they are. Funny thing, as far back as Republican Presidential hopeful Barry Goldwater, Republicans used to speak pretty highly of “extremism.”

with precision without risking American casualties.

So, it's only U.S. casualties that matter? In fact, U.S. drones, violating due process, have assassinated and otherwise killed at least a handful of U.S. citizens. And, let's not forget that some U.S. drone operators, seeing the dirty work they're caught up in, suffer from PTSD. Seeing the aftermath of their drone strikes (demolished homes, incinerated bodies) can get old...and even deeply disturbing.

"President Barack Obama found drones so effective and useful that over two terms, he approved 542 strikes that killed 3,797 people"

3,797 "high value" targets? Using these Pseudos-tats in this way perpetuates the legend that weaponized drones are "precise" and that we somehow know how many and who are killed in drone strikes.

"in non-battlefield areas where American forces were not directly engaged, including Pakistan, Yemen and"

The NY Times is perpetuating the notion tht U.S. forces – JSOC for example – weren't operating on the ground in these target areas.

"But this seductive tool of modern warfare has a dark side. Seemingly bloodless"

Oh really?

"and distant, drone strikes can tempt presidents and military commanders to inflict grave damage without sufficient forethought, violating sovereign rights"

. . . .not to mention violating the U.N. Charter, other International Law and Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution –

which makes International Law the “Highest Law of our land”.

“and killing innocent civilians.”

. . . not to mention armed others who can be said to be resisting attacks on their land. Whether or not this is a fair characterization of their motives, it’s clear that they aren’t invading the U.S., and that they aren’t being killed in “self-defense”.

“Civilian deaths during Mr. Obama’s tenure undermined American counterterrorism operations”

Such operations are themselves – like aerial warfare generally – terrorism. The so-called “War on Terrorism” is a War of Terrorism.

“and became a recruiting tool for more extremists. Mr. Obama was persuaded to impose sensible constraints on the use of drone strikes between 2013 and 2016.”

It’s not clear that Mr. Obama had the power to “impose” on the war machine. It’s certainly not clear that during his administration drones were deployed with “sensible constraint”. At what point beyond “3797” do the killings begin to lack “constraint”? At what point beyond “3797” are killings no longer “sensible”? Does the NY Times realize the key role U.S. drones play in swelling the flood of refugees fleeing the killing fields?

“The White House would decide which individuals outside of the traditional”

To use “traditional” so blithely is to normalize illegality.

“war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan could be targeted, and there had to be

“near certainty” that no civilians would be killed.”

But apart from administration assertions, there’s no evidence of such “near certainty”.

In traditional war zones, military commanders make these decisions without interagency review, and the threshold for acceptable civilian casualties is less strict.

Now comes disturbing news: President Trump and his administration are moving to dilute or circumvent the Obama rules. This could have disastrous outcomes,

“Could have”???!

not least because Mr. Trump seems even more enticed by drone warfare than Mr. Obama was. In the days since his inauguration, the tempo of airstrikes has increased significantly.

Yes.

“Mr. Trump has already granted a Pentagon request to declare parts of three provinces in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia is fighting Iranian-backed Houthis rebels, to be an “area of active hostilities.” This, The Times has reported, would enable more permissive battlefield rules to apply. The president is also expected to soon approve a Pentagon proposal to do the same for parts of Somalia, where militants of the Shabab who are linked to Al Qaeda threaten regional stability.”

Could it be that the U.S. imperial presence in the region is what threatens “regional stability”?

“Both designations are supposed to be temporary, giving the administration time to decide whether to rescind or relax the Obama rules more broadly.

Military commanders often chafe at civilian oversight. But there is no evidence that the Obama rules have slowed counterterrorism efforts, and there are good reasons to keep them in place, including the fact that the legal basis for such strikes lacks credibility because Congress never updated the 2001 authorization for war in Afghanistan to take account of America’s expanded military action against terrorists in Syria, Yemen and Libya.”

So, if only the Congress attends to the bureaucratic detail of “updating” the rules, all will be Okay?

“Mr. Trump should heed the advice of national security experts who have urged the retention of strict standards”

As if under Mr. Obama, “strict standards” have been retained?! Have the NY times editors not read Jeremy Scahill’s “Dirty Wars”?

“for using force in non-battlefield areas and warned how even a small number of civilian deaths or injuries can “cause significant strategic setbacks” to American interests.”

“The mind-deadening phrase “American Interests,””

The mind-deadening phrase "American Interests," like "Terrorism," is seldom defined by pundits or main stream media. They seldom acknowledge, if ever, that "American Interests" = The Interests of U.S. corporations (i.e. not those of enlisted people or U.S. taxpayers).

He has already seen how a badly executed mission can have disastrous results: the raid in Yemen in January that resulted in the deaths of a member of the Navy's SEAL Team 6 and numerous civilians, including children.

And what were U.S. Seals doing there in the first place?! The U.S. is somehow entitled to send its warriors anywhere it wants?

"And as most experts agree, killing terrorists does not by itself solve the threat from extremists."

There's that slippery, normalizing NY Times language again.

"For that, Mr. Trump will need a comprehensive policy that also deals with improved governance"

Is the NY Times suggesting that Mr. Trump and those that put him in power should get to impose their notion of "improved governance"?!

"in the countries where terrorists thrive and with ways to counter their violent messages on social media."

Right.

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