

# Alice's Nightmare in Droneland- Live at Hancock Air Base

## Statement Read at the Alice's Nightmare in Droneland Event:

*from World Beyond War Blog, published October 29, 2020*

*We assemble here this morning to petition our government to end its use of killer MQ9 Reaper drones piloted from Hancock Air Force Base. Hancock is home to the 174th Attack Wing of the New York State National Guard. The 174th – together with all too many troops on other US bases across the planet – has been waging murderous war, in our name, against the people of the Islamic oil lands, against Iraqis, iranians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Syrians, Yemenis, Somalis, Libyans ...*



*We come from across New York State and Beyond, united as the Upstate Drone Action Coalition, a grassroots assembly of nonviolent activists. For years our local members have demonstrated here weekly, protesting Hancock's role in these crimes against humanity. A score of times for the past*

decade, Upstate Drone action – under cover of the first amendment of the U.S, Constitution – has engaged in civil resistance at Hancock's very gate. Dozens of us have been arrested, have gone to trial, and some have endured prison. We persist because MQ9 drone attacks are evil. They are shameful, barbaric, illegal, racist. They are unjust, immoral, cowardly. They are islamophobic... They help generate the planet's swelling ranks of refugees as human beings are displaced, maimed, killed, orphaned, widowed. Sadly, drone attacks numb our conscience.

Weaponized drone attacks are naked terrorism. What is 'terrorism', constantly invoked but rarely defined? Genuine terrorism is violence – or the threat of violence – perpetrated on civilians for political or economic gain. Our nation is the greatest purveyor of terrorism on our planet. U.S. terrorism spawns blowback. Last January's reaper drone assassination of Iran's General Qassim Suliemani, for example, risked extreme retaliation. Given the volatility of our era, such attacks may very well spark nuclear war. That is, global annihilation.

High-tech drone terrorism generates proliferation, with many nations racing – in defense – for mastery of the skies. Weaponized and surveillance drones have already come home to roost. Hancock's Reaper drones, menacingly, have even surveilled our weekly demonstrations.

Friends, look around you. See the imagery from that brilliant 19th century fable, Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland'. We call our 21st century tableau, 'Alice's Nightmare in Drone Land'. Chesire cat, depicted here tells us drone assassination is madness. Mad Hatter, knowing that the U.S. military is one of the world's major polluters and consumers of oil, urges us to stop destroying our climate.

"Alice herself cries out, 'Please don't kill me – I'm not a terrorist.' Let us open our hearts to the anguished cries of

*every 'Alice', especially those mothers and children throughout the oil lands. And if, finally, we would open our ears to our fellow humans, we might also come to hear the screams – carried by wind, fire and flood – of our anguished and very resistant planet.*



James Ricks of Ithaca and Harry Murray of Rochester, long time Drone protesters and veterans of civil resistance at Hancock Field

### **Drone Warfare Update from Upstate Drone Action:**

#### **U.S. expanding drone strikes from Somalia into Kenya**

Camp Simba is on Manda Bay, Kenya's east coast, an airbase that the U.S. command has been using for over a decade. There, private Pentagon contractors have been flying surveillance flights throughout northern Africa and for drone attacks against Islamist militants in Somalia. The contractors also operate armed drones although they don't make targeting decisions. This allows the U.S. Africa Command to maintain the quasi-legal distinction that only uniform-wearing service members, who are lawful combatants, make the decisions as to who to target and kill.

Although Kenya's President has made public statements disavowing the Pentagon's use of its territory, it is not a passive host to American military operations. It has received more military aid than any country in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the world's top 5 recipients of U.S. counter-terrorism aid.

This use of private contractors is becoming more and more common. Aerex Aerospace is a major contractor at the Manda Bay airbase, having won \$44M in federal contracts in 2019. The Paris based news site Africa Intelligence reports its pilots operate Reaper drones and other intelligence-gathering aircraft throughout West Africa. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have relied on contractors because they give some degree of plausible deniability. Last year, the Pentagon spent \$370 billion, more than half the US military budget on contractors. (Brown and Boston Universities research)

There has been an expansion of lethal airstrikes with unaccounted civilian casualties in Somalia in the last three years. Human rights groups have reported 4-10 fold more civilian deaths from airstrikes than has the U.S. Africa Command. There is no reason to believe that lethal drone attacks in Kenya would be any more transparent.

The killing of Islamist militants based on suspicions and intelligence reports that later prove false has become the common practice in Somalia. The Trump administration has gone further, giving commanders expanded authority to order lethal drone strikes. As of late September, the military had not received executive approval to begin targeting in Kenya. But putting in place the infrastructure points toward yet another effort to expand an undeclared war in yet another country.

### **U.S. Arms Deal Integral part of UAE recognition of Israel**

A previously secret part of the United Arab Emirates

diplomatic recognition of the state of Israel has become public in recent months. The Emiratis had been pushing for at least six years to buy F-35 fighter planes and Predator and Reaper drones. Israel had objected to the sales based on its reliance on a 50-year U.S. policy of maintaining the country's "qualitative military edge" over the neighboring Arab countries. Israel has a fleet of the stealth F-35 fighters and is a leading purveyor of advanced drone technology. Since 2017, Congress has prevented arms sales to the UAE and Saudi Arabia because of the thousands of civilians killed in their proxy war with Iran in Yemen.

Previously the U.S. government had held back on selling the Reaper drones, made by Lockheed Martin, because sales are banned by an arms control pact among 35 nations. In July, the Trump administration announced it would bypass the relevant parts of the agreement and issues sales licenses.

One thing that continues to amaze me is that even prize winning journalists whose articles I pulled this information from; never refer to Israel as a nuclear weapons power. This back-story of the U.S. obsession with Iran's nuclear weapons development is the pathetic public secrecy of our maintenance of nuclear superiority in the Middle East, not to mention everywhere else in the world.

### **Court Rules Against Trump drone killing policy**

A U.S. district court has ordered the Trump administration to lift the total secrecy surrounding its rules for drone strikes and other killings abroad. This order comes as a result of Freedom of Information Act lawsuits filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and New York Times in December 2017.

The Trump administration's rules, known as the "Principles, Standards, and Procedures," are believed to loosen Obama-era policy restrictions aimed at limiting civilian casualties in areas "outside of active hostilities," such as in Yemen,

Somalia, among others. The district court rejected the administration's claim that it could not even confirm or deny whether the new rules exist. The Trump lethal force rules reportedly include lifting a requirement that a target must present a "continuing, imminent" threat to the United States, and permitting lethal strikes against a broader category of people, including those with no special skills or leadership roles. The Trump administration's rules also reportedly eliminate the high-level vetting required for each individual strike, instead requiring only "higher-level approval" of "country plans" that will be reviewed annually.

Brett Max Kaufman, senior staff attorney with the ACLU, had the following comment:

*"Just like during the last administration, a court has decided that President Trump has stretched implausible claims of secrecy over the government's killing rules too far. The government should not only acknowledge these new rules exist, but make them public. Credible media and human rights groups have made clear that the Trump administration is killing more people in more places, with civilians and their communities bearing the brunt of tragic costs. We look forward to the government's response and to ensuring the administration is held accountable for this country's lethal force program abroad."*

### **Trump Sued Over U.S. Sanctions on War Crimes Investigation**

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is in the midst of investigating possible war crimes committed by the U.S. military in Afghanistan. In June the Trump administration issued executive orders sanctioning the Court. This has resulted in legal jeopardy for four law professors who have been providing legal advice and education to the ICC. The four, Diane Marie Amann of the University of Georgia School of Law, Milena Sterio of the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law,

Margaret deGuzman of Temple University's Beasley School of Law and Gabor Rona of the Cardozo School of Law, have filed a lawsuit claiming the order violates their First Amendment rights. The federal sanctions regime threatens them with as many as 20 years in prison.

### **U.S. Drone Strike in Syria Kills a Child as well as two Al Qaeda operatives**

Airwars, the London-based airstrike monitoring group, reports that on October 15<sup>th</sup> the U.S. military carried out a drone strike killing two senior Al Qaeda operatives in Saeed, a town west of Idlib in northwest Syria. The strike killed a child and wounded multiple other civilians. The United Nations reported that two aid workers and their driver were injured, one of them critically, when the car they were traveling in was hit by shrapnel from a drone strike on another car in Idlib the same day. The U.S. Central Command has not reported on any civilian harmed in the killings. Neither Fox News nor the Washington Free Beacon, the only two news outlets to cover this strike, mentioned the suspected civilian casualties.