

Letter to the Editor of the Syracuse Post Standard

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Friends,

“Is the US winning the drone war?” Doyle McManus poses this question in his April 30 Post-Standard syndicated column. It’s a question every U.S. taxpayer and policy maker might ask.

But let’s first define the terms.

What do we mean by “war”? There was a time when war was declared, and mutually visible forces clashed. A time when war entailed risk, sacrifice, and courage. A time when war might entail ideals.

What does it mean to “win” a war? That we get the greater body count? That we demolish the most cities? That we terrorize more of their citizens? That we get to maintain or install their puppet government? That we grab precious resources (oil!) or control more markets, pipe lines, trade routes or cheap labor? That our war machine creates more – otherwise unnecessary and toxic – jobs? That our corporations pile up even more outlandish profit?

There was a time, not so long ago, when winning a war meant foiling the invader, the conqueror, the imperialist, the bully. It meant defending our shores. It meant winning hearts and minds and securing the peace. There was a time when war wasn’t so conveniently “global” or “perpetual.”

McManus tells us drones are “precise,” but fails to resolve the paradox of how it happens that drones incinerate and dismember so many civilians and non-combatants. And he fails to note the hundreds of thousands of tribal people in

Afghanistan and Pakistan forced to flee their homes and villages, dreading sudden death from the skies.

McManus tells us that in this drone war, “There’s a lot to like about lethal drones...” But goes on, “as long as you’re the owner, not the target.” Exactly. Not so astutely he claims the lethal drones are “less costly than many of the alternatives including manned bombers and boots on the ground.” He ignores life-serving and more economical alternatives: humanitarian aid; negotiation; discontinuing arms sales – especially to war-torn regions; no longer propping up tyrants and rogue governments; respecting U.N. resolutions and treaties that would reduce hatred toward the U.S. And embracing treaties to significantly reduce the climate change generating global disruption, migration and strife.

Perhaps McManus’s column is just part 1 of two parts. In part 2 he might define what he means by “terrorist.” This is so readers won’t be left thinking the word only refers to anyone opposing the U.S. war machine, whether foreign or domestic. And in part 2 McManus could tell us about the threat lethal – as well as non-weaponized surveillance – drones pose to civil liberties here in the United States.

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