

A Forgotten Drone Victim And the U.S. War on Indigenous Peoples

by Judith Bello, 2017



Malik Jalal in Islamabad in 2012.

In Pakistan in October of 2012, my group of peace activists met Malik Jalal, who spoke to us about the effect of drones on his community in Waziristan and later accompanied our caravan up to Tank, a town on the edge of Waziristan, where we joined a lively anti-war rally. I specifically remember Malik Jalal as a handsome man in the prime of life, accustomed to having authority. He had a full beard and wore the garb of a Tribal leader, and spoke about the suffering of his people living under drones. There was humor in his expression and I remember that he laughed and his eyes twinkled when members of our delegation told of being arrested for sitting outside a military base demanding an end to drone wars. Only in response to a direct question did he talk about his own experience. He said that he sometimes slept in the mountains so as not to put his family at risk.



Click the Photo to read Malik Jalal's story in his own words.

Last summer, in 2016, I saw a photo of a man visiting London to share his experience with living under drones and demand that the drones stop flying over Waziristan. His name was Malik Jalal. I thought I recognized the man I had met in Pakistan, but an organizer with my group dismissed the possibility out of hand. I waited a little, then went to my photos and took out a photo to compare with the one in the British news article. ** I was then certain it was the same man. He had aged, and his beard was shorter. He was dressed in ordinary Afghan and Pakhtun garb rather than the robes of a Chieftain. But it was the same Malik Jalal we had met in Pakistan. It was sad, really, to see him so much aged in the few years since I had met him.

This week, when I was researching the story of Faisal bin Ali Jabar, I noticed an article on the Reprieve website about Malik Jalal. They are the ones who hosted him in London last summer, and also hosted the CodePink Peace Delegation to meet Waziri Drone victims in Pakistan. I think the headline I saw last summer was in the Guardian. In any case, what interested me were the details of Malik Jalal's story. When we met him in Pakistan, he had primarily focused his remarks on the suffering of his people. I imagine he did the same when he was in London. However, the article on the Reprieve website described how he was targeted and stalked by US

drones. On repeated occasions, people were blown up by drone in proximity to Jalal's path; a friend expecting him for dinner, people at a meeting he was on his way to attend, a family member who was driving his car, and even a random car the same color as his own traveling down the road behind him.

Malik Jalal is not an Al Qaeda operative or member of the Taliban. As a Malik, he is a tribal leader on the payroll of the Pakistani government. He works as a moderator in resolving tribal disputes and is a senior member of the North Waziristan Peace Committee. While carrying out his duties, he might occasionally attend a meeting with a Taliban member present. They too belong to local tribes, and some hold positions of authority. But there is no possible justification for stalking Malik Jalal to try to kill him, terrorizing his family and killing a number of innocent people who were mistaken for him. But Malik Jalal says that the reason he is being targeted is because he came forward and spoke out against the drone strikes on other members of his community.

In 2011, Reprieve called a Jirga with a lawyer named Shahzad Akbar to bring together the people of Waziristan who wished to end the drone killing in their towns and villages. Another person who came forward to try to end the drone strikes in Waziristan, and they were many, was a teenage boy who offered to search for missile parts in the vicinity around his home town. The Jirga (town hall meeting) must have been infiltrated by CIA agents because within a few days this 16 year old boy was incinerated by a drone strike while driving down the road with his 11 year old cousin. Reprieve and Shahzad Akbar, however, have persevered in their efforts to end drone killing in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere, and they have continued to work with members of the community like Malik Jalal who are willing to come forward with information and to demand that the murderous drone strikes end.

Today, we don't hear about this issue very often in the mainstream news. The war in Afghanistan is going badly. After hearing Malik Jalal's story, this is not surprise. It may be that there are less drone strikes in Pakistan this year, but although the drone strikes in Afghanistan are neither tracked or recorded, they are surely occurring at an accelerated pace. If we are loosing there, perhaps we should look at other solutions than war. There is no moral justification for the US war in Afghanistan and no moral or legal justification for bombing people in the tribal region of Pakistan, a country which is not at war with us. Code Pink invited Shahzad Akbar to come and speak in the US in 2013, but he was unable to get a visa. The Afghan Peace Volunteers and their mentor, Hakim were invited a couple of years later, but also failed to receive visas. These are all peace activists who can inform us about the damage done by US wars in their countries.

Drone wars have drifted out of our attention, but that is not an accident. Since the early days of broad political resistance to the use of drones for targeted killing (execution of suspects) and surveillance, it is become more and more difficult to get specific information about drone strikes. They are reported together with manned air strikes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. But what they don't tell us is that over time, drone strikes have become the majority of aerial attacks. Drone strikes in Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan are not reported at all. Google doesn't bring in the news from foreign news outlets about local drone strikes the way it used to. The news is disappearing before our eyes.

How can we support a peace that will allow a country like Afghanistan to reintegrate? Malik Jalal's story gives us some ideas. The tribal councils can go a long ways towards restoring balance if they can be safely held. Americans have a strongly negative understanding of tribes because they are the indigenous power structure in countries like Afghanistan

that have been resistant to westernization. But is westernization right for Afghanistan, or Pakistan? Maybe not. The United States works through militarization. That is strong suit of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, the only tribal representatives who are empowered through U.S. intervention are violent warlords. These same men are then brought together with westernized rulers to govern the country.

Malik Jalal and his ilk are grass roots leaders who come from the communities they govern and take personal responsibility for the welfare of the people. Tribal leaders at this level actually do represent the people. They can lead an independence movement that really is independent of foreign intervention. These are the men who attend tribal councils and support the public welfare. Warlords and western educated ideologues only have coercive relationships with the people. Grass roots movements are dependent on the people on the ground and their local representatives, men like Malik Jalal. Unfortunately, they cannot safely meet with US drones on the wing. In 2011, a US drone strike in Waziristan killed 54 men at a tribal Jirga where they were meeting to discuss a local mine.

Men like Malik Jalal are deemed terrorists, threatened and targeted by drone strikes, and driven from their homes. Why? They represent the people and not the power structure the U.S. is attempting to impose on their countries. This is true in many places. Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Sadrist movement in Iraq are both engaged in the national political system as well as supporting powerful militias that are determined to protect their countries and their people. So called 'Signature' strikes which target 'suspicious' gatherings make any kind of meeting or gathering dangerous. People are isolated and alienated. Grass roots governance is not the worst basis for the blasted tribal society of Afghanistan. But, drones cause a barrier to that possibility.

I liked Malik Jalal so I wanted to tell you his story. Unfortunately, though the Independent covered his visit in a respectful manner as did the Daily News, they along with some members of the U.S. press wonder why he is in London and has not been arrested. Clarissa Ward, a bold modern woman, a professional journalist, became a friend of Al Qaeda in Syria, willing to report from East Aleppo while it was still held by Ahrar Al Sham, Al Nusra and ISIS last fall, standing in an empty street dressed in a black dress with veil and hijab in a city where women were liberated from that requirement decades ago.

Under the Tabloid style headline: I'm on the U.S. Kill List Pakistani Elder Claims. Clarissa Ward tells you that she doesn't buy his claim. Ms. Ward criticizes Malik Jalal as paranoid and a complainer. She wonders how he could he have got a visa to the UK if he were on the U.S. 'kill list'. Malik Jalal didn't jump on a plane to NY because he could never get a visa there, and men identified for targeted killing are routinely not arrested. The idea is to avoid the complexity of a legal confrontation. Dead men tell no tales.

Clarissa Ward is both arrogant and ignorant. She doesn't listen. Clarissa Ward didn't meet Malik Jalal near the beginning of his ordeal when he spoke to a group of foreign peace activists on behalf of his community without mentioning his own suffering. Her world is firmly under control unlike the real world she pretends to unveil for her listeners. Ms. Ward pretends. That is her job. Malik Jalal lives the nightmare the pretenders want to erase. Jalal was brought to London by Reprieve, an organization that defends drone strike victims, Guantanamo prisoners and men on death row. Reprieve is the real deal. Malik Jalal represents the real people of Waziristan.

Jalal came to London for relief nearly 4 years after sharing his story, along with several other survivors of drone strike victims, with my delegation in Islamabad. He he had come

forward to a meeting arranged and facilitated by Shahzad Akbar to reach a broader audience. We brought their stories back but it wasn't enough to end the killing and was soon dropped by the ever busy news cycle. Malik Jalal says that he fears to go home now. He doesn't want to die and he wants his family to be safe. Imagine! What if your friends and family members were regularly killed when they attempted to interact with you? It was sad for me to see the man who so proudly represented his people 4 years before, now terrorized into leaving his country to seek relief. It was heartbreaking to see his face lined with stress to the point where those who had met him with me did not recognize him, and so did not support him.

But this is, and has been from the start, the U.S. pretense of 'a War on Terrorism'. Peace loving leaders of indigenous communities, men like Malik Jalal, are threatened, stalked and then ridiculed. Extremist murderers holed up in East Aleppo flying ISIS and Al Nusra (Al Qaeda) flags and shelling civilian housing and schools that happen to border their territory in West Aleppo are presented as noble 'rebels' and their defeat continues to be mourned by the U.S. mainstream media and some alternative venues, even as residents of liberated communities return home in the hundreds of thousands. In Syria, Clarissa Ward happily complied with the oppressive demands with regard to women's dress asserted by a mostly foreign force controlling the area. She presents this as adopting to a 'Syrian' cultural requirement. Apparently she never took the time to research the common culture of Syria before the war began.

In Yemen, the drone strikes against AQAP (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) were gobbled up by a war against all the people of Yemen. Now AQAP, a Saudi ally on the ground, controls vastly more territory in Yemen than before the war, while the United States gives unbounded support to the Saudi air war that is tearing the country apart. They claim to be

fighting AQAP with a deadly drone strike here and there, while they are all in supporting the Saudi war against Houthi 'Shia terrorists', an indigenous militia that is a broadly popular movement in the north part of the country who are allied with the remnants of the Yemeni army. The 'internationally recognized' government of Yemen that the Saudis and their allies claim to fight for is a joke; one man; a single, unpopular, temporary 'president' who refused to call an election when his term had ended, for some reason internationally recognized as the rightful ruler of Yemen. The United States and the United Nations are ready to stand by while Yemen is subjected to a genocidal mix of famine and disease caused by U.S. assisted bombing of public infrastructure and a siege enabled by U.S. and western European ships in the Arab Sea blocking access to Yemeni ports.

We call Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Sadrists in Iraq 'terrorists' despite the fact that both organizations are deeply involved in the politics of their respective countries, both support secular governance despite the fact that they are movements lead by Shia clerics, and both groups have political alliances with movements backed by other religious organizations. Muqtada al Sadr has met with the Kurdish government and with the respected Council of Sunni Scholars. Hezbollah is allied with one of the Christian currents in Lebanon, supports the liberation of Palestine and has seen the danger of a regional wave of extremist violence. Both Hezbollah and the Sadrists are popular grass roots organizations that grew out of civil wars initiated by western interventions. Both have powerful militias, but neither has fought beyond the mandate to protect their own country. Yet the U.S. designates them as the most dangerous of terrorists in league with their sworn enemies in ISIS and Al Qaeda because Hezbollah is capable of defending Lebanon against Israel, and the Sadrists support a secular socialist government in Iraq.

Populist leaders and grass roots leaders are the ultimate enemy of American hegemony. They operate below the radar when they are at their best. They are trusted because they are men who come from the people and who have not forgotten their roots, and because they choose to support the welfare of the people above their own. They can't be bought and they don't make good proxies for empire.

And so dear Malik Jalal, you have my highest respect wherever you are, in London or somewhere in Pakistan. I pray that one day you will be able to go home and live in peace with your family. And that all the victims of U.S. aggression and the violence of U.S. allies will be restored to your homes and your lives. I bow to your suffering and to your dignity. I raise your name so that you and the others like you will not be forgotten.

****Featured Image:** *Malik Jalal with his family ~Printscreen From CNN/Reprieve Video, April 22, 2016*

**** Note:** I went to look for a video recording I made of Malik Jalal in Pakistan in late 2012, but YouTube had removed (deleted) it from my account since the last time I looked – some time in the last few months.