

# Why was Daniel Hale Silenced? Daniel Hale Must be Pardoned!

## Statement by Ban Killer Drones Coalition

We raise our voice in deep concern on the silencing and imprisonment of Daniel Hale. Daniel Hale did not commit a crime.

It is outrageous that Daniel Hale was charged, prosecuted and sentenced to 45 months in Federal prison for exposing a criminal program. Daniel Hale should be pardoned!

Daniel Hale leaked documents that revealed extremely high civilian death rates in U.S. drone attacks. The 33-year-old Air Force veteran first spoke out publicly against drone warfare in 2013. Daniel Hale's whistleblowing also uncovered secret U.S. watch lists, Presidential drone kill lists, and other criminal and unethical aspects of the U.S. deployment of killer drones.

Since the Nuremberg Tribunal we have been taught that "just following orders" is not a defense. Soldiers, even in time of war, have a moral obligation to oppose illegal orders in every possible way, especially the killing, for any reason, of non-combatants.

Daniel Hale revealed that a U.S. government "kill chain" targeted its victims for extrajudicial execution based on minimal evidence and that, in one 5 month period in Afghanistan, 90% of the people killed in drone attacks were not the intended targets. NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden explained that that showed that the majority of those killed were "innocents, bystanders, or not the intended target. We couldn't have established that without Daniel Hale's voice." Daniel Hale felt a responsibility to oppose these criminal acts.

With much publicity we are told that U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Iraq are withdrawing. But attacks on defenseless civilians through U.S. drone wars and economic sanctions are intensifying.

Daniel Hale felt deeply that the people in the U.S. have a right to know the crimes committed in their names.

We also have a responsibility to raise our voices in opposition to these continuing wars and to the sentencing of Daniel Hale.

The war criminals who authorize the use of thousands of drone strikes and other criminal killings should be prosecuted.

Sign the Petition for a pardon for Daniel Hale:

<https://www.codepink.org/danielhale>

Initial signers of the above statement:

- CODEPINK
- Ban Killer Drones
- International Action Center
- Peace Action New York State
- "Rising Together!"
- Upstate NY Coalition to End the Wars and Ground the Drones
- Wisconsin Coalition to End the Wars and Ground the Drones
- Brandywine Peace Community, Philadelphia
- Occupy Beale Air Force Base
- The Nuclear Resister
- Fellowship of Reconciliation USA
- Veterans for Peace New York City Chapter 34
- United National Antiwar Coalition

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# Daniel Hale's Letter to the Judge

*by Daniel Hale, published on the Sparrow Project, July 23, 2021*

It is not a secret that I struggle to live with depression and post traumatic stress disorder. Both stem from my childhood experience growing up in a rural mountain community and were compounded by exposure to combat during military service. Depression is a constant. Though stress, particularly stress caused by war, can manifest itself at different times and in different ways. The tell-tale signs of a person afflicted by PTSD and depression can often be outwardly observed and are practically universally recognizable. Hard lines about the face and jaw. Eyes, once bright and wide, now deepset and fearful. And an inexplicably sudden loss of interest in things that used to spark joy. These are the noticeable changes in my demeanor marked by those who knew me before and after military service. To say that the period of my life spent serving in the United States Air Force had an impression on me would be an understatement. It is more accurate to say that it irreversibly transformed my identity as an American. Having forever altered the thread of my life's story, weaved into the fabric of our nation's history. To better appreciate the significance of how this came to pass, I would like to explain my experience deployed to Afghanistan as it was in 2012 and how it is I came to violate the Espionage Act, as a result.

In my capacity as a signals intelligence analyst stationed at Bagram Airbase, I was made to track down the geographic location of handset cellphone devices believed to be in the possession of so-called enemy combatants. To accomplish this

mission required access to a complex chain of globe-spanning satellites capable of maintaining an unbroken connection with remotely piloted aircraft, commonly referred to as drones. Once a steady connection is made and a targeted cell phone device is acquired, an imagery analyst in the U.S., in coordination with a drone pilot and camera operator, would take over using information I provided to surveil everything that occurred within the drone's field of vision. This was done, most often, to document the day-to-day lives of suspected militants. Sometimes, under the right conditions, an attempt at capture would be made. Other times, a decision to strike and kill them where they stood would be weighed.

The first time that I witnessed a drone strike came within days of my arrival to Afghanistan. Early that morning, before dawn, a group of men had gathered together in the mountain ranges of Patika province around a campfire carrying weapons and brewing tea. That they carried weapons with them would not have been considered out of the ordinary in the place I grew up, much less within the virtually lawless tribal territories outside the control of the Afghan authorities. Except that among them was a suspected member of the Taliban, given away by the targeted cell phone device in his pocket. As for the remaining individuals, to be armed, of military age, and sitting in the presence of an alleged enemy combatant was enough evidence to place them under suspicion as well. Despite having peacefully assembled, posing no threat, the fate of the now tea drinking men had all but been fulfilled. I could only look on as I sat by and watched through a computer monitor when a sudden, terrifying flurry of hellfire missiles came crashing down, splattering purple-colored crystal guts on the side of the morning mountain.

Since that time and to this day, I continue to recall several such scenes of graphic violence carried out from the cold comfort of a computer chair. Not a day goes by that I don't question the justification for my actions. By the rules of

engagement, it may have been permissible for me to have helped to kill those men—whose language I did not speak, customs I did not understand, and crimes I could not identify—in the gruesome manner that I did. Watch them die. But how could it be considered honorable of me to continuously have laid in wait for the next opportunity to kill unsuspecting persons, who, more often than not, are posing no danger to me or any other person at the time. Nevermind honorable, how could it be that any thinking person continued to believe that it was necessary for the protection of the United States of America to be in Afghanistan and killing people, not one of whom present was responsible for the September 11th attacks on our nation. Notwithstanding, in 2012, a full year after the demise of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, I was a part of killing misguided young men who were but mere children on the day of 9/11.

Nevertheless, in spite of my better instincts, I continued to follow orders and obey my command for fear of repercussion. Yet, all the while, becoming increasingly aware that the war had very little to do with preventing terror from coming into the United States and a lot more to do with protecting the profits of weapons manufacturers and so-called defense contractors. The evidence of this fact was laid bare all around me. In the longest or most technologically advanced war in American history, contract mercenaries outnumbered uniform wearing soldiers 2 to 1 and earned as much as 10 times their salary. Meanwhile, it did not matter whether it was, as I had seen, an Afghan farmer blown in half, yet miraculously conscious and pointlessly trying to scoop his insides off the ground, or whether it was an American flag-draped coffin lowered into Arlington National Cemetery to the sound of a 21-gun salute. Bang, bang, bang. Both served to justify the easy flow of capital at the cost of blood—theirs and ours. When I think about this I am grief-stricken and ashamed of myself for the things I've done to support it.

The most harrowing day of my life came months into my deployment to Afghanistan when a routine surveillance mission turned into disaster. For weeks we had been tracking the movements of a ring of car bomb manufacturers living around Jalalabad. Car bombs directed at US bases had become an increasingly frequent and deadly problem that summer, so much effort was put into stopping them. It was a windy and clouded afternoon when one of the suspects had been discovered headed eastbound, driving at a high rate of speed. This alarmed my superiors who believe he might be attempting to escape across the border into Pakistan.

A drone strike was our only chance and already it began lining up to take the shot. But the less advanced predator drone found it difficult to see through clouds and compete against strong headwinds. The single payload MQ-1 failed to connect with its target, instead missing by a few meters. The vehicle, damaged, but still driveable, continued on ahead after narrowly avoiding destruction. Eventually, once the concern of another incoming missile subsided, the driver stopped, got out of the car, and checked himself as though he could not believe he was still alive. Out of the passenger side came a woman wearing an unmistakable burka. As astounding as it was to have just learned there had been a woman, possibly his wife, there with the man we intended to kill moments ago, I did not have the chance to see what happened next before the drone diverted its camera when she began frantically to pull out something from the back of the car.

A couple of days passed before I finally learned from a briefing by my commanding officer about what took place. There indeed had been the suspect's wife with him in the car. And in the back were their two young daughters, ages 5 and 3 years old. A cadre of Afghan soldiers were sent to investigate where the car had stopped the following day. It was there they found them placed in the dumpster nearby. The eldest was found dead due to unspecified wounds caused by shrapnel that pierced her

body. Her younger sister was alive but severely dehydrated. As my commanding officer relayed this information to us she seemed to express disgust, not for the fact that we had errantly fired on a man and his family, having killed one of his daughters; but for the suspected bomb maker having ordered his wife to dump the bodies of their daughters in the trash, so that the two of them could more quickly escape across the border. Now, whenever I encounter an individual who thinks that drone warfare is justified and reliably keeps America safe, I remember that time and ask myself how could I possibly continue to believe that I am a good person, deserving of my life and the right to pursue happiness.

One year later, at a farewell gathering for those of us who would soon be leaving military service, I sat alone, transfixed by the television, while others reminisced together. On television was breaking news of the president giving his first public remarks about the policy surrounding the use of drone technology in warfare. His remarks were made to reassure the public of reports scrutinizing the death of civilians in drone strikes and the targeting of American citizens. The president said that a high standard of "near certainty" needed to be met in order to ensure that no civilians were present. But from what I knew, of the instances where civilians plausibly could have been present, those killed were nearly always designated enemies killed in action unless proven otherwise. Nonetheless, I continued to heed his words as the president went on to explain how a drone could be used to eliminate someone who posed an "imminent threat" to the United States. Using the analogy of taking out a sniper, with his sights set on an unassuming crowd of people, the president likened the use of drones to prevent a would-be terrorist from carrying out his evil plot. But, as I understood it to be, the unassuming crowd had been those who lived in fear and the terror of drones in their skies and the sniper in this scenario had been me. I came to believe that the policy of drone assassination was being used to mislead the

public that it keeps us safe, and when I finally left the military, still processing what I'd been a part of, I began to speak out, believing my participation in the drone program to have been deeply wrong.

I dedicated myself to anti-war activism, and was asked to partake in a peace conference in Washington, DC late November, 2013. People had come together from around the world to share experiences about what it is like living in the age of drones. Fazil bin Ali Jaber had journeyed from Yemen to tell us of what happened to his brother Salem bin Ali Jaber and their cousin Waleed. Waleed had been a policeman and Salem was a well-respected firebrand Imam, known for giving sermons to young men about the path towards destruction should they choose to take up violent jihad.

One day in August 2012, local members of Al Qaeda traveling through Fazil's village in a car spotted Salem in the shade, pulled up towards him, and beckoned him to come over and speak to them. Not one to miss an opportunity to evangelize to the youth, Salem proceeded cautiously with Waleed by his side. Fazil and other villagers began looking on from afar. Farther still was an ever present reaper drone looking too.

As Fazil recounted what happened next, I felt myself transported back in time to where I had been on that day, 2012. Unbeknownst to Fazil and those of his village at the time was that they had not been the only watching Salem approach the jihadist in the car. From Afghanistan, I and everyone on duty paused their work to witness the carnage that was about to unfold. At the press of a button from thousands of miles away, two hellfire missiles screeched out of the sky, followed by two more. Showing no signs of remorse, I, and those around me, clapped and cheered triumphantly. In front of a speechless auditorium, Fazil wept.

About a week after the peace conference I received a lucrative job offer if I were to come back to work as a government



contractor. I felt uneasy about the idea. Up to that point, my only plan post military separation had been to enroll in college to complete my degree. But the money I could make was by far more than I had ever made before; in fact, it was more than any of my college-educated friends were making. So, after giving it careful consideration, I delayed going to school for a semester and took the job.

For a long time I was uncomfortable with myself over the thought of taking advantage of my military background to land a cushy desk job. During that time I was still processing what I had been through and I was starting to wonder if I was contributing again to the problem of money and war by accepting to return as a defense contractor. Worse was my growing apprehension that everyone around me was also taking part in a collective delusion and denial that was used to justify our exorbitant salaries, for comparatively easy labor. The thing I feared most at the time was the temptation not to question it.

Then it came to be that one day after work I stuck around to socialize with a pair of co-workers whose talented work I had come to greatly admire. They made me feel welcomed, and I was happy to have earned their approval. But then, to my dismay, our brand-new friendship took an unexpectedly dark turn. They elected that we should take a moment and view together some archived footage of past drone strikes. Such bonding ceremonies around a computer to watch so-called "war porn" had not been new to me. I partook in them all the time while deployed to Afghanistan. But on that day, years after the fact, my new friends gaped and sneered, just as my old one's had, at the sight of faceless men in the final moments of their lives. I sat by watching too; said nothing and felt my heart breaking into pieces.

Your Honor, the truest truism that I've come to understand about the nature of war is that war is trauma. I believe that any person either called-upon or coerced to participate in war

against their fellow man is promised to be exposed to some form of trauma. In that way, no soldier blessed to have returned home from war does so uninjured. The crux of PTSD is that it is a moral conundrum that afflicts invisible wounds on the psyche of a person made to burden the weight of experience after surviving a traumatic event. How PTSD manifests depends on the circumstances of the event. So how is the drone operator to process this? The victorious rifleman, unquestioningly remorseful, at least keeps his honor intact by having faced off against his enemy on the battlefield. The determined fighter pilot has the luxury of not having to witness the gruesome aftermath. But what possibly could I have done to cope with the undeniable cruelties that I perpetuated?

My conscience, once held at bay, came roaring back to life. At first, I tried to ignore it. Wishing instead that someone, better placed than I, should come along to take this cup from me. But this too was folly. Left to decide whether to act, I only could do that which I ought to do before God and my own conscience. The answer came to me, that to stop the cycle of violence, I ought to sacrifice my own life and not that of another person.

So, I contacted an investigative reporter, with whom I had had an established prior relationship, and told him that I had something the American people needed to know.

**Respectfully,**  
**Daniel Hale**

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**Daniel Hale** is an Airforce Veteran who served in Afghanistan as an intelligence analyst. He became disillusioned with his work on seeing numerous videos of innocent civilians torn to pieces by drone strikes based on the information he provided. After his discharge he provided information to a

reporter with the Intercept on the technical configuration of the US global drone system along with the truth about the efficacy and accuracy of drone killing which formed the basis of, a series of articles called “The Drone Papers”.

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# Drone whistleblower Daniel Hale Needs Your Support

*by StandWithDanielHale, published on CourageToResist, June 22, 2021*

**In May 2019**, drone whistleblower Daniel Everette Hale was arrested and indicted on allegations that he disclosed classified documents about the U.S. military’s assassination program, believed to have been the source material for a series in The Intercept called “The Drone Papers”. **On March 31, 2021**, Hale pleaded guilty to a single count under the Espionage Act, carrying a maximum sentence of 10 years. Sentencing is currently scheduled for July 27, 2021.

**How to help (write to Daniel, ask for a pardon from President Biden, donate, and more)**

Hale is a veteran of the US Air Force. During his military service from 2009 to 2013, he participated in the US drone program, working with both the National Security Agency and the Joint Special Operations Task Force at the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. After leaving the Air Force, Hale became an outspoken opponent of the US targeted killings program, US foreign policy more generally, and a supporter of whistleblowers. He publicly spoke out at conferences, forums, and public panels. He was featured prominently in the award-winning documentary National Bird, a film about whistleblowers

in the US drone program who suffered from moral injury and PTSD. Hale based his criticisms on his own participation in the drone program, which included helping to select targets based on faulty criteria and attacks on unarmed innocent civilians.

Daniel is facing up to 10 years in prison for contacting the press about a matter of extreme public importance that has been shrouded in secrecy. But the larger concern is not what Hale did or didn't do but what our government has been doing. For almost two decades, they have used a veil of secrecy to deny the American public the basic right to informed debate and consent. Government officials have repeatedly lied about nature and the extent of drone assassinations. No one has ever been held accountable for these lies, or for the war crimes they have enabled.

Daniel is a whistleblower who has enriched the public's knowledge about matters of grave civic concern. It is unconscionable to use a law supposedly aimed at actual spies and saboteurs, against individuals who act in good faith to bring government misconduct to the attention of the public.

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