

US Killer Drone Attacks Kill Innocent Civilians

by Larry Gilbert Sr., published AntiWar.com, November, 18, 2021

As a people represented by our government, what gives us the right to go into other countries and indiscriminately assassinate people? Do we think that “American exceptionalism” gives us that right? How would we feel if the roles were reversed? Families around the world are merely trying to live their lives in peace as much as we are here in America.

As a Vietnam War veteran and seeing the ravages of war from that time forward, I have become a member of two organizations, Veterans for Peace and World Beyond War.

At the end of September, I traveled to Indian Springs, Nevada, to join with fellow members as well as members of Code Pink: Women for Peace and other organizations from 12 states. This is where Creech Air Force Base is located – some 50 miles north of Las Vegas.

We spent a week camped out in the desert. We conducted nonviolent protest actions at the entrance to the drone base twice daily, when drone pilots would arrive for work in the morning and leave at the end of their shifts. All the while during the day and night, killer drones were buzzing loudly over us and doing touch and goes on the runway.

The U.S. drone program has been ongoing for some 20 years by the Air Force and the Central Intelligence Agency. As a country, we have used killer drones in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia and Yemen. The last I knew, we haven't declared war with these countries, other than Afghanistan and Iraq – our perpetual wars.

Hardly ever have we, the American people, heard of the strikes that are conducted ever so frequently in these countries with no accountability. Thousands of strikes have taken place during these 20 years and thousands of people have been killed, including so many innocent civilians. The civilians killed are merely referred to as "*collateral damage*."

The "*collateral damage*" are families made up of innocent men, women and children.

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On Aug. 29 of this year, as we were withdrawing from Afghanistan, the US fired a drone strike where its missile(s) struck a car parked by Zamarai Ahmadi outside his home. The strike slaughtered him and nine members of his family, including seven children, five of whom were younger than 10.

According to the New York Times, "the Pentagon claimed that Ahmadi was a facilitator for the Islamic State and that his car was packed with explosives, posing an imminent threat to US troops guarding the evacuation at the Kabul Airport."

General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., commander of the US Central Command, said "*the drone strike dealt a crushing blow to Islamic State*." General Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff, called it a "*righteous strike*."

I ask, what is righteous about killing 10 innocent people?

It was only after investigative news reports that there was proof that this was in fact an attack on Zamarai Ahmadi, 45, an engineer for a U.S.-based nonprofit. Generally, most drone strikes have no follow-up investigations.

A recent report of the incident said it was an "*honest mistake*" and what the drone pilots and their commanders saw was what they call "*confirmed bias.*" In other words, they saw what they wanted to see.

How often does that happen? I suspect quite often, by those giving the orders to fire the missiles.

Unfortunately, those young Air Force drone pilots have to come into work every morning and fire missiles from drones killing people during the day and go home to their families at the end of their shift, especially after seeing the carnage that they wreaked. I suspect that some of these pilots will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder after a period of time.

How will they and their families' lives be impacted in the years following? I would encourage those who feel this sense to seek help from organizations such as ours, Veterans For Peace, to assist them.

On another note, the Israeli government flies drones day and night over the Gaza Strip, where Palestinians live in a state of terror that missiles will be fired at them. Aside from that fear, the noise offers another sense of harassment.

It is high time to kill killer drones. Peace and justice.

Larry Gilbert Sr. is a former mayor and police chief of Lewiston, U.S. marshal, and U.S. Army veteran. Distributed by PeaceVoice.