

GROUND THE DRONES LEST WE REAP THE WHIRLWIND
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April 7, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Barack Obama,

We are a group of U.S. citizens (several from Chicago) and citizens of other countries undertaking a nonviolent protest demonstration at Creech Air Force Base (Indian Springs Auxiliary Field) northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada. We are protesting the development and use of drone hunter-killer aircraft in particular, and, in general, the use of military force in Afghanistan and Pakistan to try to generate greater security for the United States and its allies. We believe that drone aircraft are immoral, dehumanizing, will result in the deaths of thousands of innocent people, and will generate such hatred for the U.S. that our security will be substantially diminished, rather than increased.

Drone aircraft are part of the strong trend in the U.S. military to try to “automate” warfare. The impulse to do this is understandable, for war is always dangerous, and it is natural to try to protect and limit the casualties of one’s own military personnel as much as possible. But creating weapons that kill at long range, placing their users almost entirely out of immediate harm’s way, will have the effect of so angering those we attack that we will risk the most desperate, devastating, and merciless retaliation. Already, we have seen this in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon. Unable to defeat us in conventional warfare, our “enemies” resorted to secret, suicidal attacks against our civilian population.

MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper drone aircraft are fitted to carry laser-guided bombs and guided air-to ground missiles. The MQ-9 can carry more than a ton of bombs and missiles. Manned aircraft, in which crews have had visual contact with targets, have been so unable to distinguish between combatants and civilians that, in recent military operations, particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, thousands of non-combatants, including many women and children, have been killed and maimed. There is no reason to believe that drone aircraft, controlled by operators perhaps thousands of miles away from their targets, are going to be any better able to distinguish between combatants and civilians. We can expect innumerable ghastly “mistakes” through the firing of munitions carried by drones.

In addition to the death and destruction that these weapons will cause, we deplore their psychological effect on those who operate them. It may be less dangerous to operators of drone weapons to kill from a great distance, but doing so dehumanizes warfare further, and makes the use of such deadly violence more likely. Because killing is easy and “safe,” drone operators will become more and more callous.

The development and use of drones are part of the entire, mistaken idea that security ultimately can be founded on military force. Despite spending trillions of dollars on weapons since World War II, conducting almost continuous wars, and establishing a worldwide virtual empire of military bases, the United States is not more secure. Our policies have created weapons of mass destruction worldwide, found now in the hands of our potential “enemies” as well as friends. There are tens of thousands of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of at least eight nations. The universal danger of these weapons is so clear that our government is horrified by the thought of potential “enemies” like Iran and North Korea obtaining them. We are completely hypocritical in our anti-nuclear policies, denouncing the efforts of potential “enemies” to obtain weapons of mass destruction, while maintaining our own arsenals of thousands of weapons targeted at “enemy” cities, and continually spending billions of dollars to upgrade existing arsenals and develop new weapons.

We believe that you are right in seeing the need for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and that there is a connection between violence and poverty; that when people are poor, unemployed, and see no prospect for improving their lives, they will be more inclined to becoming involved in hate-motivated terrorist groups. We hope that you will come to understand that military approaches to preventing terrorist training bases from being established in Afghanistan and Pakistan cannot help but kill thousands of innocent people, destroy a great deal of needed civilian infrastructure, and therefore will increase, rather than decrease the power of terrorist, revenge, movements. We hope that you will ground all of the hunter-killer drones, cease military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, initiate continual diplomatic efforts to settle all disputes, use our vast economic resources to overcome poverty wherever it is found, and encourage all other nonviolent means for opposing aggression and injustice.

Sincerely,

Those demonstrating for peace and justice at Creech Air Force Base

[See http://nevadadesertexperience.org/issues/2009/ground_the_drones.htm for a copy of this letter as well as other background and public statements from Ground the Drones.]