

Ground the Drones...

Lest we Reap the Whirlwind

A witness in the desert that peace will come through love and not through predators armed with hellfire

Creech Air Force Base is home to the latest high tech weapons that use unmanned aerial systems (UASs) to carry out surveillance and increasingly lethal attack missions in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The idea that technology can provide a cleaner and safer battlefield is seductive but has been proven a lie. From the catapult and crossbow, through the use of poison gas and airplanes in World War I, the atom bomb, helicopters and napalm in Vietnam to the "smart bombs" of the Gulf War, war has only grown deadlier. Technological advances may reduce the danger of casualties among the military personnel in the short run, but with each advance the number of civilian deaths multiplies and every war of the past century has numbered more children than soldiers among its victims.

Proponents of the use of UASs insist that there is a great advantage to fighting wars in "real-time" by "pilots" sitting at consoles in offices on air bases far from the dangerous front line of military activity. With less risk to the lives of our soldiers and hence to the popularity and careers of politicians, the deaths of "enemy" noncombatants by the thousands are counted acceptable. The illusion that war can be waged with no domestic cost dehumanizes both us and our enemies. It fosters a callous disregard for human life that can lead to even more recklessness on the part of politicians.

With audacity that would confound Orwell, the Pentagon touts the "true hunter-killer role" of these robot "drones." Armed with "Hellfire" missiles and other weaponry, they have names that suit their lethal uses: the MQ-9 "Reaper" and the MQ-1 "Predator." Such tools can kill but not pacify. By killing civilians, UAS drones do not prevent or eliminate terrorism, but instead incite more violence and retaliation.

We wait in vigil at the gates of Creech AFB to witness that peace will not come through the work of predators armed with hellfire. Antagonisms against the US in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq will be reduced when we actively respond to the reality of the poverty and lack of infrastructure revealed to us by the drone's own surveillance cameras. Human interaction, negotiation, diplomacy and dialogue, not surveillance and bombing by robots, will ensure a more peaceful future at home and abroad.

People of all faiths are invited to gather from April 1-13 in the Nevada desert, sacred land stolen from the Western Shoshone. Our vigil marks the holy days of Passover and the last days of Lent, the season in which the Christian church commemorates Jesus' struggle of forty days with demons in the desert. We come to this desert parched and thirsty--with intention to act as the winds and breath that will erode and sculpt the structures of war into thirst quenching rivers. We come to confront and resist our own high tech demons. On Good Friday, the day of Jesus' execution by the Roman Empire, we act nonviolently in solidarity with the victims of our own empire.

Vigil sponsors include Voices for Creative Nonviolence, Nevada Desert Experience, the Des Moines Catholic Worker, Strangers & Guests Catholic Worker Farm, Catholic Peace Ministry, Iowa Peace Network, Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service.

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