

Sharing Seeds: Colombia and Afghanistan

by Buddy Bell

*“If a seed doesn’t die, it simply remains a seed.
“But if it dies, through dying, it bears fruit in abundance.”*

This is a rough translation of a hymn I heard many times in Spanish masses in the United States. When I was in San Josecito, Colombia, I heard it again, yet differently, as it was accented with tearful sobs and sniffles echoing throughout the small community chapel, where the Community of Peace San Jose de Apartado marked the eve of completing its 18th year.

The community has lost many of its members to massacres, to hunger, or to sickness. By 1997, the first year of the Peace Community, a war between government and revolutionary forces had already been going on for several decades. In this context, the

attitude of the armed fighters was, “if you’re not supporting us, then we consider you the same as our enemy.”

Still, to not fight for any side was the best chance at survival. To not give information to any side was a crucial piece of demonstrating neutrality. Otherwise, “whichever side we decided to turn toward, we would



Children present 18 "tortas" (cakes) at the 18th anniversary celebration of the Community of Peace, San Josecito, Colombia.

soon be stabbed from behind.”

Remarkably, after 18 years, the peace community still has its land. It has bountiful harvests. It has its own education system for its own children. Above all, the families that make up the community have not gone off to the cities like many of their former neighbors. They still have their livelihoods as farmers. And they can see that the future of this way of life will be bright--- if they work hard, and work together.

This is a community that stands as an example for other people in the world who wish to forge a new path between thickets of war, exploitation, and exile, in order to emerge on the other side with their dignity and their love of peace intact. My trip to San Josecito was largely inspired by such an opportunity to perceive and to convey ideas and feelings, obstacles and decisions.

In March, I was honored to accept an invitation to be

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Dr Hakim interviews peace community elders Luis and Joaquin on film while Buddy serves as interpreter.

Colombian army, AUC paramilitary forces, and FARC rebels all carried out assassinations of Peace Community leaders. They brutally killed and disappeared dozens of community members (and even young children) for simply daring to organize together on a plot of land and declare themselves neutral. The



Dear New Friends,

I am delighted to be the newest member of the Voices community. I just received my B.A. in sociology from St. Olaf College, and returned to the Uptown neighborhood to volunteer with Voices while I pursue my career in non-profit work. Last year, I spent several months living and working in Uptown through the Associated Colleges of the Midwest Chicago program. During that time, I also worked at Uptown Bikes and interned for the Crossroads Fund. I am looking forward to reconnecting with Chicago and the Uptown community this summer.

Now that I've descended the ivory tower of academia (or been lovingly kicked out like a baby bird from the nest), I am excited to continue learning through Voices. While my experience thus far has consisted of learning about injustice through the sociological theory of power relationships, I am eager to apply that knowledge to demanding justice from our government and pursuing peace overseas. I have already learned so much in the week that I've been with Voices. Hopefully you will hear more from me in the coming months as I develop a better consciousness of the injustices our own military has enacted and continues to enact on the people of the Middle East (and elsewhere). I owe my presence at Voices to the generosity of the Voices community, as well as the kind reference from Maria Barnes, venerable small business owner and friend of Voices. In solidarity,

Carly Tsuda

Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, generous friends sent me dozens of novels to read during my three months' imprisonment in Lexington, KY's federal prison. Many of these novels explored themes of war and peace, and passages I felt I needed to copy out for later use before donating the books to the prison library. Today I'm drawn to one particular excerpt. It's from Sinan Antoon's novel, *The Corpse Washer*, about an Iraqi family which, for generations, had performed Muslim burial rites, washing corpses and enshrouding them. Following the 2003 Shock and Awe war in Iraq, the main character, Jawad, feels overwhelmed by the rising numbers of corpses he must care for.

"I felt as if we had been struck by an earthquake which had changed everything. For decades to come, we would be groping our way around in the rubble it left behind. In the past there were streams between Sunnis and Shiites, or this group and that, which could be easily crossed or were invisible at times. Now, after the earthquake, the earth had all these fissures and the streams had become rivers. The rivers became torrents filled with blood, and whoever tried to cross drowned. The images of those on the other side of the river had been inflated and disfigured... concrete walls rose to seal the tragedy."

War is worse than an earthquake. Following an earthquake, concerned people volunteer time and resources: relief teams from around the world race to find survivors and help reconstruct. But as wars rage, many can only watch the killing on their television screens, feeling helpless to make a difference.

Worse yet, many may sense, with queasy discomfort, that they themselves helped supply the weapons being used. It's hard to look in the mirror and see ourselves as people who have paid for the hideous weapons being developed, stored and used by U.S. forces around the world. Persistent efforts by the U.S. government to provoke new wars, isolate competing governments, and destroy possibilities for fair and just relations with other

countries is equally ugly and disturbing. But if we're ever to become rehabilitated, transformed from a menacing, fearsome empire in decline into a society that earnestly wants to align with people dedicated to building peaceable societies, we must take that long, hard look in the mirror. We must hold ourselves accountable in light of the facts about how we've squandered our resources, tolerating the insatiable demands of the world's largest killing machine, the U.S. military.

During a recent trip to Kabul, I felt a blend of relief and anxiety listening to young friends excitedly expound the future they've planned for a school, for Kabul street kids, they've recently begun. It's a relief to witness the youthful resolve with which they've created a space for children from three different ethnic backgrounds to join under one roof and learn, as they've never been allowed to learn, to read. It's a relief to know that in spite of earthquake fissures and bloody torrents of hatred and despair, our young friends feel determined to persevere on behalf of their young students. But there's plenty of cause for anxiety. Can I do my part getting internationals to fund the school? In a moment of pique, I raised my voice and insisted to my young friends that all of the countries who've fought in Afghanistan, and most especially the U.S., should be paying reparations. "Kathy," Zekerullah gently admonished me, "please don't make people in your country feel guilty. Don't you think most people would rather build than destroy?"

I've long believed that when facing opponents, one hand holds the mirror for them to see their lives while the other offers to balance and steady them. Thank you for helping us learn about communities trying mightily to take down the concrete walls Antoon writes about, building a world wherein it's easier to be good and where humans heal disasters rather than make them. We see that work all around us and we're grateful to offer testaments in this newsletter. **Kathy Kelly, on behalf of Brian Terrell, Tom Heuser, Buddy Bell, Carly Tsuda, Sean Reynolds and Hina Abbasi at Voices for Creative Nonviolence**

Poems from Jeju by David Smith Ferri

Rosary Beads

On a wet, cold, windy morning
during mass at the entry to the Jeju naval base
site,
we stand and clasp hands with our co-
conspirators,
wishing each other peace.
Drawing in her breath with alarm
and remarking how cold my hands are,
one old Korean woman holds and rubs them,
a look of concern on her face.
Each day, after the liturgy,
we stay put and say a full rosary,
forcing the line of trucks waiting to enter the base
to stay put too.
They stand like prehistoric beasts,
their breath coming in ragged white puffs.
Above their heads,
the familiar prayers, in unfamiliar Korean,
ring out on a loudspeaker,
casting a spell.
But on this morning, as prayers begin,
the old Korean woman
drops her polished set of dark, brown,
wooden rosary beads
into my lap, so I can keep count
and know which prayer to say.
She takes off her wedding ring,
which has ten notches,
and counts on it.
For the next twenty-five minutes,
in the rain and cold,
I finger the beads,
my hands protesting in silence.

Ant and Pillbug

At exactly 11:01,
as mass began and police started filming,
an ant and pillbug, wearing neckerchiefs over
their faces
and armed with ropes and carabineers,
climbed out of a crevice in the naval base
entryway
and passed under an activist's chair.
Undetected by security guards,
unmolested by boots or truck tires,
they crossed into the base at 11:04,
right on schedule,
and managed the difficult crossing of the naval
base road
just as police carted off the last activist blocking
the driveway
and opened the sluices
setting free the dammed flow of trucks waiting to
get out of the base.
By the time police review the day's footage,
they could be anywhere.



People who served on the VCNV delegation were Sidney Nam and Buddy Bell of Illinois, Kestrel Peace of Michigan, and David Smith Ferri of California. Delegation members are available as speakers. VCNV is especially thankful to the committed staff of Peaceworks (San Francisco) for awarding a grant to make our delegation possible.

My Five Days in Pod A

Jailed for Resisting Drones in Wisconsin

by Bonnie Block

On April 1, 2015 a six person jury found me guilty of trespassing at the Volk Field Open House because I handed out leaflets with four questions about drone warfare in the parking lot of the Wisconsin National Guard Museum. National Guard personnel deemed that “propaganda” sight unseen. The result was my arrest, being charged with trespass, pretrial motions to greatly limit the evidence I could present to the jury and ultimately the trial. The fine was \$232 but I felt I couldn’t in good conscience pay it.

So Judge Paul Curran sentenced me to serve five days in the county jail. After I was “booked in” and issued my orange jump suit and orange plastic clogs, I was escorted to Pod A where I became the 7th woman living in a two-story cinderblock room about 35 by 15 feet. The front half was common space. Metal tables with stools or benches attached, a TV high on the wall, a cabinet with the various request forms and some books & games or puzzles and



Bonnie with Jim Murphy at Volk Field

two phones filled the room. The front wall was one-way glass so guards in the “bubble” could see in but we couldn’t see out.

The back half of the room was divided into two levels each of which had five bunk-beds and a bathroom with shower. There were seven narrow windows on each level but they were opaque so no one could see out. The TV was on from 8 am till 11 pm (or 12:30 am on weekends) as were bright florescent lights which were dimmed after “lockdown” but never turned off.

[NOTE: The Juneau County Jail was built in 2002 and its website describes the jail like this: “This modern Pod design allows Jail Deputies to restrict and control the movement of prisoners throughout the facility, while minimizing the staff needed to monitor and control the

population. This layout places pods or housing units around a centralized control center from which a single deputy can monitor all of the cells and each pod. The Control Deputy can control cell doors, lights, water, inmate’s communications and inmate movement. CCTV monitoring is conducted from the central control station as well.”]

I set my small storage box and bedding on Cot #2 as directed and the guard left, slamming the metal door shut. I introduced myself to four of the women (the other two were napping) and told them why I was there. We talked a while and then I went to make my bed. One of the women came to help because the sheets were only about 2/3 the length of the blue plastic mat that served as a mattress, but if you knotted them together just right you could cover the whole pad.

A few hours later as I was working on a puzzle, I realized I was chilly because I only had a short sleeved shirt and no socks (my socks, bra, and turtleneck were the wrong color so they stayed in storage in the booking area). I went to put my towel around my neck like a shawl. Immediately there was a voice over the intercom: “Ladies, please inform the new person what the rules are.” The rules are that you cannot cover your neck or face. I put the towel back and rubbed my arms. Without a word one of the women went to her box and brought me a thermal long-sleeved shirt and another brought me a warm pair of socks — both regulation white. Thanks to their generosity I was comfortable for the rest of my stay.

As I listened to these women for the next few days I heard stories of being victimized or suffering abuse, of addiction to drugs, of homelessness, of illness, of needing dental care or surgery, of poverty and unemployment, and of more than a dozen children in foster care or cared for by relatives while their mothers were locked up. Five of the six women were there because they couldn’t make bail or were on a probation hold. Only one had already been tried and sentenced to one year in jail.

I entered the jail voluntarily to make a public witness with support from family and friends and knowing I would get out in five days. They entered abruptly and now sit waiting weeks or months for a court date, or a visitor (allowed once a week) or till they could make a phone call (\$1.50 a minute to a corporation called Securus which someone outside has to pay in advance and then accept the collect calls.) They waited for mail or finding a book that looked interesting, or for the Friday commissary pick-up (assuming someone had put money in their accounts.) And they walked—54 times around the common area was a mile and you counted it off with a deck of cards.

I’ve seen clients in various Wisconsin jails and prisons and I’ve visited fellow resisters in jail — but it’s very different to have metal doors clang shut and know that you’ve lost your freedom. I expected there to be regimentation and rules — but I had no idea of how frustrating and aggravating the guard’s collective

punishment mindset would be. I knew I'd be locked up in a confined space — but didn't understand what happens when you don't know if it's day or night and feel cut off from the natural world. I knew there would be little privacy and a lot of surveillance—but I didn't know how dehumanizing that would feel.

In short, I have been one of the absurdly privileged people who has not had to face the punitive U.S. criminal justice system—just as I have not lived in countries beneath the Hellfire Missiles carried by U.S. drones that I'm working hard to stop. As I was writing this reflection a few days after I got out of jail, the daily e-mail from Campaign Nonviolence arrived and put both of these things into context.

“No one today can afford to be innocent, or to indulge themselves in ignorance of the nature of contemporary governments, politics and social orders. The national politics of the modern world are “states” which maintain their existence by deliberately fostered craving and fear:

monstrous protection rackets” (Gary Snyder, *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, p. 83).

It is precisely our “craving and fear” which makes us wrongly believe we are protected from the “terrorists” by our government's program of targeted assassination via drones. And it is precisely “a protection racket” which makes us think spending billions on jails and prisons is being “tough on crime” and that we're safer if we lock people up in cells or Pods without adequate services or diversion programs and often before they've even been convicted of a crime.

Just as we can't kill our way to peace and security, we can't imprison our way to public safety and justice. Militarism and drone warfare are not the answer. Nor are jails the answer. Those who have created the current systems are not going to be the ones who fix it. That's up to us as nonviolent, determined, and relentlessly persistent activists. *Contact Bonnie Block at blbb24@att.net*

Let It Shine! -- a Walk for Peace with Justice Stand Up to the Shadow Drone and Killing by Racial Profiling

Join Voices for Creative Nonviolence, Wisconsin Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars, and Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice

Madison, Wisconsin to Volk Field, August 18-25

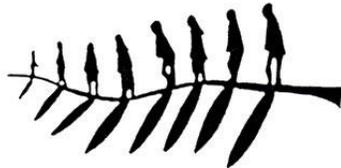
We will walk from the Dane County Jail in Madison, Wisconsin to Volk Field in Camp Douglas, Wisconsin, about 90 miles. Volk Field is the home of the Wisconsin Air National Guard. This base trains pilots to remotely operate the "Shadow" drone by computer linkup. Drones of this type are used in conjunction with the U.S. Army and Marine Corps for reconnaissance, surveillance, targeting, and assessment.

We start from the Dane County Jail and end at Volk Field to underline the connection between the violence perpetrated by the drones indiscriminately killing people of color overseas and the militarization of our police forces at home where people of color are being killed through the use of police violence.

There will be a kick-off event on the evening of Monday August 17 in Madison. The walk will begin on Tuesday morning with a short program in front of the Dane County jail.

We will be walking through the beautiful, hilly Wisconsin countryside. The daily walks will range from 12 – 16 miles. We will take advantage of opportunities to share with communities we are passing through.

The walk ends on Tuesday August 25 with a vigil against drones at the gates of Volk Field. The Wisconsin Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars has been holding monthly vigils at the gates of Volk Field for 3 ½ years.



We hope you will join us for this crucial walk to ground the drones!

If you live in Wisconsin and would like to participate, provide housing, or organize meals and events, please contact Joy First at joyfirst5@gmail.com or call 608 239-4327.

If you live outside Wisconsin and want to discuss participating in the walk, please contact Buddy or Carly at info@vcnv.org or call 773-878-3815.

“We Are Like People Drowning”

“All families are scattered, and we ask Americans who were behind all this to help Iraqis now.”

by Cathy Breen

Cankiri, Turkey May 6, 2015

As I write I am looking out a bus window at a beautiful landscape of rolling hills and mountains. Everything is green, and the trees are budding. It is hard to know where to begin. In the past week, I have traveled hundreds of miles by bus and train in order to visit Iraqi refugees living here. Eskisehir, Ankara, Bolu, Mersin and now Cankiri. Some of the families are refugees twice over, having fled to Syria where we first met them some years ago. Others fled more recently after ISIS took Mosel last June and then the surrounding villages. Some of them I was meeting for the first time. Muslims, Christians and Palestinians, all from Iraq.

Last night Iraqi friends, refugees themselves, took me to a family I had not yet met. I thanked them for receiving me and explained how many people come with me on this trip wanting to know how he and his family are doing. Upon hearing this, he could hardly contain his emotions, his words spilling out rapidly.

“We have been waiting for someone to come!” he exclaimed. “We needed someone to visit us. We are happy that someone is thinking of us.”

A handicapped sister, 39 years of age, sat on the floor beside him. His wife and four sons surrounded him: 21, 19, 15 and 10 years of age. The family has only been registered by the Turkish government, and were given a date of December 2021 for their interview with the UNHCR. At this time, almost six years from now, their history will be taken and the family will be asked if they have relatives anywhere else in the world. Only then might they be considered for resettlement. In the meantime, work is not permitted and children are not in school! How are they to live?

Earlier in the day I met with another refugee family with three children, ages 8 and 6 years and 4 months. They were given an interview date for the UNHCR of Sept. 2022. Yes, you read correctly... seven years from now! None of the above mentioned children are in school. By 2022 these children will be 15 and 13 years of age, and the youngest just turning school age. The father’s parents are

both in Australia, but the UNHCR will not register that fact until 2022, unless their interview date is moved forward. The father said he pled repeatedly with the clerk at the registration office to give them a date not so far in the future. The family I am staying with also have a 10 year old child with cerebral palsy in addition to two other daughters, 9 and 3 years old.

I held this child in my arms in Damascus, Syria in 2009. When given no hope for resettlement, the father returned to Mosel with his wife and then, two daughters. Both parents of the father recently received citizenship in Canada after being resettled there as refugees four years

ago. The parents of the mother have been recently resettled in Australia with refugee status. Because of his handicapped daughter, the family has been granted an interview date with the UNHCR for November of 2017. Only one and a half years to wait! Only at that interview however will their history be taken and the UNHCR will solicit information about family members living outside of Iraq. Only then might they



An Iraqi family living in Turkey

begin the tedious path for resettlement.

One thing is clear. The UNHCR is completely overwhelmed by the refugee crisis, unable to offer protection, financial assistance, food rations, schooling, etc. Mothers and fathers are beside themselves with worry as their children are not in school. One refugee related how an Iraqi camped out in front of the UNHCR office for days in an attempt to draw attention to their plight. One of the guards told the demonstrator that Iraqi families had done the same and it had made no difference. “Nobody cares” is the general feeling.

Forced to look for work “under the table,” I heard multiple stories of Iraqis working 10 to 12 hour days for a fraction of the money Turkish people would receive for the same work or, worse yet, not receiving any compensation for their labor.

“We are like people drowning” was how one refugee described the situation. “All families are scattered, and we ask Americans who were behind all this to help Iraqis now.”

Cathy can be reached at newsfromcathy@gmail.com

Taking Responsibility for Drone Killings

President Obama and the Fog of War

by Brian Terrell

When President Barack Obama apologized on April 23 to the families of Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto, an American and an Italian, both hostages killed in a drone attack in Pakistan in January, he blamed their tragic deaths on the “fog of war.”

“This operation was fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts in the region,” he said, and based on “hundreds of hours of surveillance, we believed that this (the building targeted and destroyed by drone launched missiles) was an al Qaeda compound; that no civilians were present.” Even with the best of intentions and most stringent of safeguards, the president said, “it is a cruel and bitter truth that in the fog of war generally and our fight against terrorists specifically, mistakes -- sometimes deadly mistakes -- can occur.”

The term “fog of war,” *Nebel des Krieges* in German, was introduced by the Prussian military analyst Carl von Clausewitz in 1832, to describe the uncertainty experienced by commanders and soldiers on the battlefield. It is often

used to explain or excuse “friendly fire” and other unintended deaths in the heat and confusion of combat. The term raises vivid images of chaos and ambiguity. Fog of war describes incredible noise and trauma, volleys of bullets and artillery shells, bone jarring explosions, screams of the wounded, orders shouted out and countermanded, vision limited and distorted by clouds of gas, smoke and debris.

War itself is a crime and war is hell, and in its fog soldiers can suffer from emotional, sensory and physical overload. In the fog of war, fatigued past the point of endurance and fearful both for their own lives and for those of their comrades, soldiers must often make split second decisions of life and death. In such deplorable conditions, it is unavoidable that “mistakes -- sometimes deadly mistakes -- can occur.”

But Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto were not

killed in the fog of war. They were not killed in war at all, not in any way war has been understood until now. They were killed in a country where the United States is not at war. No one was fighting at the compound where they died. The soldiers who fired the missiles that killed these two men were thousands of miles away in the United States and in no danger, even if anyone were firing back. These soldiers watched the compound go up in smoke under their missiles, but they did not hear the explosion nor the cries of the wounded, nor were they subjected to the concussion of its blast. That night, as the night before this attack, it can be assumed that they slept at home in their own beds.

The president attests that those missiles were fired only after “hundreds of hours of surveillance” were carefully

studied by defense and intelligence analysts. The decision that led to the deaths of Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto was not reached in the crucible of combat but in the comfort and safety of offices and conference rooms. Their line of sight was not clouded by smoke and debris but was enhanced by the most advanced “Gorgon Stare” surveillance technology of the Reaper drones.

The same day as the president’s

announcement the White House Press Secretary also issued a release with this news: “We have concluded that Ahmed Farouq, an American who was an al-Qa’ida leader, was killed in the same operation that resulted in the deaths of Dr. Weinstein and Mr. Lo Porto. We have also concluded that Adam Gadahn, an American who became a prominent member of al-Qa’ida, was killed in January, likely in a separate U.S. Government counterterrorism operation. While both Farouq and Gadahn were al-Qa’ida members, neither was specifically targeted, and we did not have information indicating their presence at the sites of these operations.” If the president’s drone assassination program sometimes accidentally kills hostages, it also sometimes accidentally kills Americans alleged to be members of al-Qa’ida and apparently the White House



VCNV's Kathy Kelly and Brian Terrell were among those arrested at Beale Air Force Base on April 28

expects us to take some consolation in this fact.

“Hundreds of hours of surveillance” notwithstanding, and despite being “fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts,” the order to attack the compound was given in the absence of any indication that Ahmed Farouq was there or that Warren Weinstein was not. Three months after the fact, the United States government admits that they blew up a building that they had been watching for days without the slightest idea who was in it.

The “cruel and bitter truth” is actually that Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto were not killed in a “counterterrorism effort” at all, but in an act of terrorism by the United States government. They died in a gangland style hit that went awry. Killed in a high-tech drive-by shooting, they are victims of negligent homicide at best, if not of outright murder.

Another “cruel and bitter truth” is that people who are executed by drones far from a battlefield for crimes they have not been tried for or convicted of, such as Ahmed Farouq and Adam Gadahn were, are not enemies lawfully killed in combat. They are victims of lynching by remote control.

“Predators and Reapers are useless in a contested environment,” admitted General Mike Hostage, chief of the Air Force’s Air Combat Command in a speech in September, 2013. Drones have proven useful, he said, at “hunting down” al Qa’ida but are no good in actual combat. Since al Qa’ida and other terrorist organizations have only flourished and multiplied since Obama’s drone campaigns took off in 2009, one might take issue with the general’s claim for their usefulness on any front, but it is a fact that the use of lethal force by a military unit outside of a contested environment, outside of a battlefield, is a war crime. It might follow that even the possession of a weapon that is useful only in an uncontested environment is a crime, as well.

The deaths of two western hostages, one an American citizen, are indeed tragic, but no more so than the deaths of thousands of Yemeni, Pakistani, Afghan, Somali and Libyan children, women and men murdered by these same drones. Both the president and his press secretary assure us that the events in Pakistan last January were “fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts,” business as usual in other words. It seems that in the president’s view, death is only tragic when it is inconveniently discovered that western non-Muslim people are killed.

“As President and as Commander-in-Chief, I take full responsibility for all our counterterrorism operations, including the one that inadvertently took the lives of Warren and Giovanni,” said President Obama on April 23. From the time President Ronald Reagan took full responsibility for the Iran-Contra arms deal to the present, it is clear that a presidential admission of responsibility means that no one will be held accountable and that

nothing will change. The responsibility that President Obama accepts for only two of his victims is too paltry for consideration and, along with his partial apology, is an insult to their memories. In these days of governmental evasions and official cowardice, it is crucial that there are some who do take full responsibility for all of those killed and act to stop these acts of reckless and provocative violence.

Five days after the president’s announcement of Weinstein’s and Lo Porto’s murders, on April 28, I was privileged to be in California with a dedicated community of activists outside of Beale Air Force Base, home of the Global Hawk surveillance drone. Sixteen of us were arrested blocking the entrance to the base, reciting the names of children who have also been killed in drone attacks but without a presidential apology or even, for that matter, any admission that they died at all. On May 17, I was with another group of anti-drone activists at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri and in early March, in the Nevada desert with more than one hundred resisting drone murders from Creech Air Force Base. Responsible citizens are protesting at drone bases in Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, New York, at RAF Waddington in the United Kingdom, at the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, at the White House and other scenes of these crimes against humanity.

In Yemen and in Pakistan, too, people are speaking out against the murders taking place in their own countries and at great risk to themselves. Lawyers from Reprieve and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights have filed suit in a German court, charging that the German government has violated its own constitution by allowing the U.S. to use a satellite relay station at Ramstein Air Base in Germany for drone murders in Yemen.

Perhaps one day President Obama will be held responsible for these murders. In the meantime, the responsibility that he and his administration shirks belongs to all of us. He cannot hide behind a fog of war and neither can we.

Brian’s work with Voices is assisted by a grant from the Puffin Foundation, puffinfoundation.org.

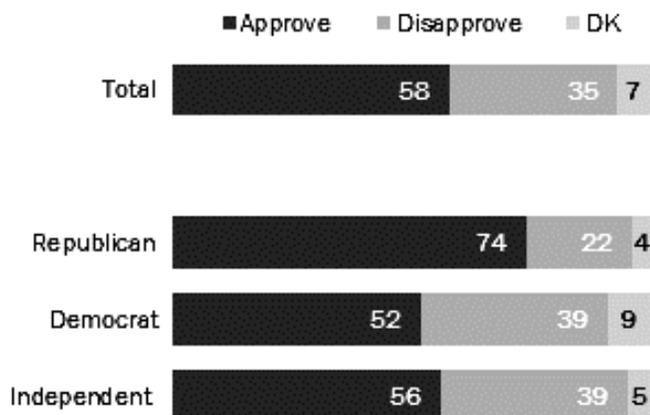
Headlines Notwithstanding, Support for Drones Drops Slightly

by Buddy Bell

A new survey just released by the Pew Research Center (www.pewresearch.org) found that respondents have become much more likely to voice their disapproval over the U.S. drone assassination program. In a phone survey conducted from May 12-18, 2015, Pew found that 35 of

Majority Supports U.S. Drone Strikes

U.S. drone strikes to target extremists ... (%)



Survey conducted May 12-18, 2015.

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

every 100 respondents said they disapproved “of the United States conducting [drone strikes] to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.” The complete report of Pew’s methodology indicates that the last time they asked this particular question was from February 7-10, 2013. In that survey, only 26 of every 100 respondents disapproved, so in the span of two years the disapproval rate shot up by 9 points, constituting a 34% increase.

Approval for the drone program went up, though not as dramatically. Between 2013 and 2015, responses of approval increased from 56 to 58 per 100, a change which is actually smaller than the survey’s stated margin of error of 2.5 percentage points.

The remaining portion of respondents who said they didn’t know or who refused to answer decreased by 11 percentage points between 2013 and 2015, and people who publicly advocate for an end to the drone assassination program have won more of them over to their side: apparently by a factor of 4 and a half.

Yet much of the media that have reported on this survey would have you believe that there has come to be a solid bulwark of support for the drone program. A sampling of recent headlines:

Pew Research Center:

“Public Continues to Back U.S. Drone Attacks”

Politico:

“Poll: Americans overwhelmingly support drone strikes”

Times of India:

“Majority of Americans support drone strikes in Pakistan”

Al-Jazeera:

“Poll finds strong support for drone strikes among Americans”

AFP:

“Nearly 60 per cent of Americans back drone strikes overseas”

While some of the headlines are technically true, the analyses inside the stories paint a different picture than reality, as I have not seen any discussion about trends or any comparisons of the 2015 survey to earlier ones.

The most pernicious headline, perhaps, comes from Pew itself. The Pew writers presumably read their own survey reports, yet they claim a continuity of public backing which is not demonstrated by the data. Suppose a gambler wins 20 dollars but loses 90; is that breaking even?

Regardless of what media will or will not say, there is a hot story here: drone opponents are making progress in convincing the public that drone strikes are not a wise or moral course of action for the United States to pursue. They might be approaching a breakthrough moment if they keep their momentum.

Sharing Seeds

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present for San Josecito’s 18th anniversary celebration, and I was lucky to have the chance to serve as my fellow invited guest and friend Hakim’s guide and translator. Hakim has lived for 12 years in Afghanistan while mentoring an inter-ethnic community of young men and women in their teens and twenties who wish to live without participation in war.

This community, the Afghan Peace Volunteers (APV) is involved in protest against war and direct service to poor children and widows in Kabul, yet they are also looking to extend into urban farming and to thrive with the participation of young families, as community members marry. Hakim thought it prudent to observe and experience a community like San Josecito, which features not only a fierce independence from the political apparatus of war, but also an agricultural character and a longstanding collective community made up of families and elders.

Accordingly, while Hakim was visiting the Peace Community, he was constantly asking questions of people in the community, inquiring of their perspective on community life and what ideas they have for a relatively young community just starting out. They each had plenty to say, and Hakim recorded many of the discussions to play back for the activists in Afghanistan. I hope that with the tools of truth, story and wise counsel, the members of the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado will be able to do again what it is that they have never stopped doing--- plant a seed and encourage it to transform.



Why do Afghan children have to polish boots and sell 'bolonis'?

By Dr Hakim
4th June 2015

Inam polishes leather shoes and Adilah sells flour pancakes.

They make a living on the dangerous streets of fortified Kabul, two of an estimated 60,000 working street kids in the capital.

10 years old, that's how small they are.

Imagine ourselves at the same eye-level as Inam and Adilah, in the dusty alleys, swarmed by smelly drains, threatened by desperate crimes.

Like them, you often hear helicopters hovering so close overhead that the windows in your rented mud rooms rattle. You see the polished, bullet-proof cars of the corrupt Afghan 'elite', mostly men, dressed in suits and ties.



Adilah with her leek pancakes ('bolonis'), waiting for customers



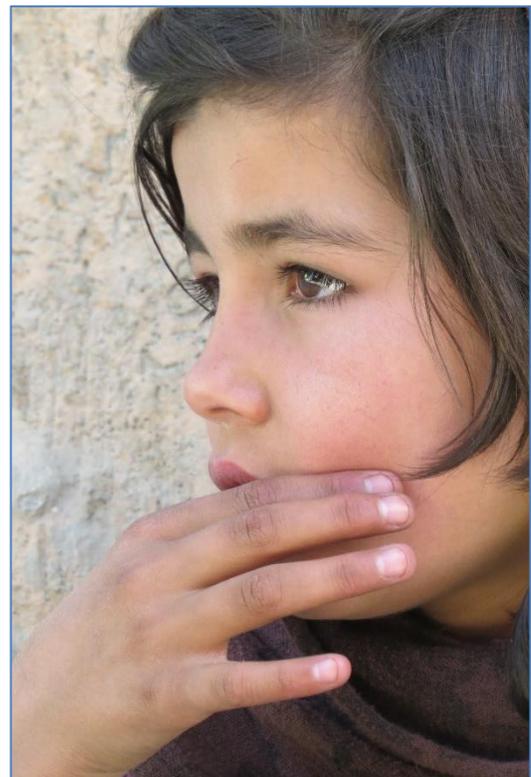
Adilah's aunt frying the leek 'bolonis' in their rented single room

Some American friends smile when they hear that the pancakes, filled with delicious mashed potatoes or salted leek, are called 'bolonis' in Dari.

"Nowadays, I don't often let Adilah sell 'bolonis' in the streets. What if she's near a suicide bomb attack?" Adilah's aunt said about the worsening security, despite 14 years of U.S. / NATO's ambitions.



Adilah walking past a gas canister shop



Adilah's thoughts are 'all over the place' when she works in the streets of Kabul

A young passerby asks, “How much is it for a ‘boloni’?”

Adilah’s voice can hardly be heard.
She appears lost in her world of uncertainties.
Earlier, her aunt had served Zarghuna and me two sizzling ‘bolonis’.
We had eaten one of them, so Adilah had gestured to the other,

“Put that on the tray too. I can sell it.”

She whispered to the customer, “Ten Afghanis.”

That’s how the world economy works today.
Even war-weary, impoverished Afghans sympathize with her,
as the young man took out a typically crumpled 20-Afghani note,
handed it to Adilah,
and waved deferringly, as if in protest,
no, please, keep the ‘bolonis’....

The young Afghan man must have been contemplating what he could do in the face of 60% unemployment.

He must have been thinking,

“Why is a small girl doing what we adults ought to be doing?”

“I don’t enjoy polishing boots but I have no choice,” replied Inam, describing his breadwinning role in a family of six persons. His father can’t support the family as he is one of Afghanistan’s 1.6 million drug addicts, and lives in another province. “We haven’t heard from our father for about 5 years.”



Inam, along the street where he usually polishes boots. A few days ago, he left his boot-polishing tools at a bakery while he played street soccer. “Someone stole my tools!” Inam understands why he has to work, but is determined to study hard too, so he can fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor.

**What does Inam wake up to every day?
His mannerisms are beyond his 10 war-years,
with a spirit of acceptance**

akin to ‘innocence’,
though he is far from naïve to be able to
evade the drug dealers,
thieves,
huge speeding cars with snarling armed guards
and angry, hungry Afghans looking for cash.
And hope.

“The drug business is violent,
as the addicts can’t do anything
except smoke under the bridges,” Inam tells the class,
which is a story about his own estranged father.
The least the American elite could do for Inam, their
fellow human being,
is not to lie that their military strategy has been a
‘success’.

The elite need to know
that Inam, like billions of the awakening 99%,
understands what’s going on.
We understand the realities in our flesh and blood.



Inam was hoping to hear his name being called out in the enrollment of street kids into the Borderfree Street Kids School, where he learns Dari, math, and nonviolence, and gets a monthly assistance of rice and oil.

The mission of the Borderfree Afghan Street Kids School for 2015 is to ‘share learning skills with 100 Afghan street kids (including Adilah and Inam) on understanding language, nature, humanity, and life, and to be students and practitioners of nonviolence.’

About 92% of the required budget for the school is spent on providing the street kids and their families with a needed monthly gift of a sack of rice and a bottle of oil.

It costs \$540 to put one street kid through the street kids school for one year.

Those interested to support the project can browse <http://ourjourneytosmile.com/blog/borderfree-afghan-street-kids-school/> for more info and write to borderfree@mail2world.com. Donations should be directed to Voices for Creative Nonviolence.

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