

VOICES

FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

vcnv.org

September 2015

Dear Friends,

The *Economist* recently reported that Angola's elephant population, having once faced "an unfamiliar menace: the millions of landmines left over from the country's decades-long conflict," seems to have learned how to "alert an entire herd to the danger of a land mine with a gesture or very low-frequency rumble," according to Joyce Poole of an NGO called Elephant Voices.

As in Angola, Afghanistan's land is still strewn with land mines and unexploded ordnance. October 7th will mark the 14th year since the U.S. first began bombing and invading Afghanistan. Our young friends in Afghanistan will no doubt wish that humans could alert each other to menacing danger as well as the elephants. For their part, they've developed a campaign intended to reach people around the world. It's called #Enough! They write the word, in Dari, on the palms of their hands and show it to cameras, wanting to shout out their desire to let goodness shine by abolishing all wars.

This past summer, collaborating with Wisconsin activists in the "Let It Shine" walk, Voices walkers called for an end to targeted drone assassinations abroad and racial profiling that kills brown and black

people within the U.S.

Participants weren't alone. They walked in solidarity with villagers in Gangjeong, South Korea, who've welcomed many of us to help stop militarization of their beautiful

Jeju Island. Seeking inter-island solidarity and recognizing how closely they share the plight of Afghans burdened by the U.S. "Asia Pivot," our friends in Okinawa, Japan will host a walk from the north to the south of the island, protesting construction of a new U.S. military base in Henoko.

Rather than provoke a new cold war, we want to shine a light on our common cares and concerns, finding security in extended hands of friendship. Thank you for your abiding solidarity and support.

Buddy Bell, Brian Terrell,
Tom Heuser, Carly Tsuda,
Kathy Kelly, and Sean Reynolds



Wisconsin Walk for Peace and Justice: Nine Arrested at Volk Field

by Joy First

Voices for Creative Nonviolence engaged with a number of Wisconsin peace groups to organize an 8-day 90-mile walk across southwest Wisconsin from August 18 to 25. The purpose of the walk was to call attention and make connections between the militarized police violence at home and the military using violence abroad through drone warfare and by other means. In both cases the victims are people of color, which forces us to reflect on the systemic racism of our society.



The walk began at the City/County/Jail complex in Madison on August 18. Dane County has one of the highest rates of racial disparity of any county in the country on many issues, including when it comes to incarceration - hence starting the walk at the jail. In fact, in order to make the prison population match the general population in Dane County, we would need to release 350 Black people. This is horrific, especially when we understand that so many people of color are in jail for nonviolent crimes and crimes of poverty that could better be solved by more positive interventions. It is up to all of us to stand up with our brothers and sisters and proclaim that "Black Lives Matter!"

There were about 15-20 walkers each day as we went through the beautiful Wisconsin countryside -

Waunakee, Lodi, across the Merrimac ferry, camping at Devil's Lake State Park and Rocky Arbor, up through Mauston and New Lisbon, and ending at Volk Field. It was eight nights of sleeping in the homes of supporters, in tents, and in church basements.



The walk participants kept going through inclement weather that is not typical for Wisconsin in August. There was rain, along with heavy wind and very cool temperatures. The cooler temperatures were better than walking in 90-degree weather, but it still made for a difficult walk. However, they kept going 12-15 miles each day, persistent and determined.

What kept us going like this for eight days? People chose to be involved with the walk, knowing it would be difficult and push them to their limits, but also knowing that the militarized violence, both abroad and at home, is causing grave suffering to many innocent people and we must do something about it. We must speak out, raise awareness, share our concerns, and most importantly call for change. And that is what we did all along the route as we built bonds of friendship and connection with each other, providing outreach and education along the way. We called for change in front of the City/County/Jail complex in Madison at the beginning of the walk, and we called for change at Volk Field at the end of the walk, as well as all along the route.

The walk came to an end at a beautiful rest area next to a noisy freeway near Volk Field. Volk Field is a

Wisconsin Air National Guard Base near the village of Camp Douglas, WI. One of the jobs there is to train personnel to operate Shadow drones. Though the Shadow drones do not carry weapons (at least that is what we are told), they carry a camera that is used for target acquisition, surveillance, and assessment, and they are part of the bigger program of drone warfare in this country. The Wisconsin Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars has been vigiling at the gates of Volk Field for 3 ½ years – with three actions of nonviolent civil resistance during that time.

After a picnic lunch we formed our final circle to discuss details for both the vigil and “risk arrest” action, we read the nonviolence guidelines, and we shared a poem. Then we processed to the gates of Volk Field. We walked slowly and solemnly, with a drum beat and a lone voice singing a mournful chant. With heavy hearts, we remembered those who have died in drone strikes and as a result of police violence. Some of the signs we carried were pictures of children who have been killed by drones, stating, “U.S. Drone Warfare is Terrorism.”



The Juneau County sheriff was at the gate with several of his deputies when we arrived. There was also a police dog, which they have never used with us in the past.

We stood, as we always do, on the grass under a big beautiful tree. Buddy and Xan began to sing the names of victims of militarized violence, going back



and forth between the name of a drone victim, and then the name of a Black woman who was killed by the police in this country. After each name the crowd responded by singing, “We remember you” accompanied by a single drum beat.

After listening to the names for a few minutes, those of us who were going to risk arrest stepped off the curb and onto the road. We slowly walked towards the gate feeling the pain of living under a government that could commit these acts in our name. We took one step onto the base and were immediately taken into custody and put into a police car.

After arresting us for disorderly conduct, officers handcuffed us in front. Jailers gave us each a bag of food, processed us and released us within about four hours. Cited for trespassing, we have a court date on September 30, 2015. The arrestees were Bonnie Block, Cassandra Dixon, Joyce Ellwanger, Joy First, Jim Murphy, Phil Runkel, Mary Beth Schlagheck, Tyler Sheaffer, and Don Timmerman.

Even though it was one of the easiest arrests I have been through, it nonetheless felt like a powerful action. The whole eight days built up to this action in which we were able to really make the connection between militarized violence at home and abroad. It is time for real action and real change in policies regarding drone warfare and police violence. We cannot, we will not rest until we have peace and justice. Let it shine! And let’s keep working.

#Enough!

the People's Agreement to Abolish War

We, the people of the human family, agree to abolish war.

Like you, we Afghans are tired of wars. War costs us everything and resolves nothing. War has increased 'terrorism'. Wars risk spiraling into our destruction by nuclear weapons.

To abolish war, we form small, local peace circles or communities of two or more persons in which we agree to ban weapons and war and to build nonviolent systems for every aspect of life.

With autonomous alternatives, we no longer need to participate in today's warring systems. We opt out, and we withhold support and money from any individual or group that uses war.

We begin to heal and live differently. Students learn better, laborers and farmers work better, mothers worry less, and basic human resources are better shared.

We nurture egalitarian relationships with nature and all human beings and connect to form a critical mass that's free of borders, going beyond our separate causes and working together for a green and equal world without war. A critical mass is crucial as we can't abolish war without reversing global warming and inequality; these are global crises driven by the same elite who rule over us by force. We abolish war person by person. We won't wait for the elite, because they're the ones who keep waging wars.

We make no distinction as to who wages the war, the scale of the war or the individual justifications for the war. We renounce all violence and wars and agree never to resort to war in any circumstance.

We, the people of the human family, agree to abolish war.

#Enough!

To sign this agreement, contact:
ourjourneytosmile.com



US Drone Campaign Needs to Be Acknowledged a Failure

Excerpt of Kourosh Ziabari's interview of Brian Terrell

TEHRAN (FNA)- The assassination drone campaign on the tribal areas of Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and Afghanistan has been one of the controversial plans of the US government in the recent years.

The White House, State Department and Pentagon officials maintain that the drone attacks are aimed at targeting the Al-Qaeda terrorists in these countries and crushing their strongholds; however, figures indicate that the majority of the victims of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles dispatched to the region are civilians. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has recently revealed that between 2004 and 2015, there have been 418 drone strikes against Pakistan alone, resulting in the killing of 2,460 to 3,967 people, including at least 423 civilians. That's while some sources put the number of civilian casualties in Pakistan during the 11-year period at 962.

An American peace activist and speaker tells Fars News Agency that the drone strategy was not a blunder which President Bush committed, rather it was a "crime" that he perpetrated and President Obama perpetuated.

Brian Terrell lives and works on a small farm in

Maloy, Iowa. He has traveled to many regions across the world for public speaking events, including in Europe, Latin America, and Korea. He has also visited Palestine, Bahrain, and Iraq and returned from his second visit to Afghanistan last February. He is a co-coordinator for Voices for Creative Nonviolence and event coordinator for the Nevada Desert Experience.

Q: The US drone attacks in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen have taken a heavy toll on the civilian population of these countries, although it's being purported that the drone campaigns are aimed at targeting the Al-Qaeda strongholds. Has the US government been able to achieve this goal through dispatching unmanned drones to these already impoverished and underdeveloped areas?

A: If the goals of US drone strikes were actually to destroy Al-Qaeda and bring stability to the regions under attack, then the drone campaign would need to be acknowledged a failure. Nabeel Khoury, the deputy chief of mission in Yemen from 2004 to 2007, has noted that “given Yemen’s tribal structure, the US generates roughly forty to sixty new enemies for every AQAP [al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula] operative killed by drones” and this perception is shared by many former diplomats and military commanders experienced in the region.

The reality that US drone strikes are a recruiting tool for Al-Qaeda is good news for war profiteers, even as it is alarming to anyone who is interested in the security of the US and the peace and stability of the countries where they are occurring.

Last February, for example, the US Navy’s \$122.4 million contract modification to Raytheon Missile Systems Co. to buy more than 100 Tomahawk missiles to replace those fired into Syria was celebrated in the media and by members of Congress without regard to the moral, legal or strategic efficacy of those attacks. The only justification needed for these lethal attacks, it seems, is that they sell missiles.

Q: In October 2013, a group of countries at the United Nations, led by Brazil, China and Venezuela, officially protested against the deployment of unmanned aerial attacks against sovereign nations by the Obama administration. The debate at the UN was the first time when the legality of US’s use of

remotely piloted aircraft and its human cost was discussed on a global level. Christof Heyns, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions warned about the proliferation of UAVs among states and terrorist groups. What’s your reaction to this ongoing debate regarding the legal basis of using drones and the fact that the international community has started to voice its opposition to this dangerous practice?

A: Every state employs lawyers to give justification for that state’s actions, no matter how egregious, but there is no real debate about the legality of the use of drones to attack or surveil over countries where the US is not at war. The official policy is that before lethal force can be used against someone who is not a combatant on a battlefield, it must be made certain “that he or she poses ‘an imminent threat of violent attack’ against America.” This might give the mistaken impression that at least an effort is made to conduct the drone campaign in compliance with international law.

In February 2013, however, a US Department of Justice White Paper, “Lawfulness of a Lethal Operation Directed Against a US Citizen Who Is a Senior Operational Leader of Al-Qa’ida or an Associated Force,” was leaked that elucidates the administration’s new and more flexible definition of the word “imminent.” “First,” it declares, “the condition that an operational leader present an ‘imminent’ threat of violent attack against the United States does not require the United States to have clear evidence that a specific attack on US persons and interests will take place in the immediate future.”

The position of the US government is that it can kill anyone anywhere whether their identity is known or not, if their “patterns of behavior” or “signature” is consistent with that of someone who might possibly pose a threat at any time in the future. The “signature” of an imminent threat “is a male between the ages of 20 and 40,” says former US Ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter.

Among the most horrific violations of law and human values is the practice of “double tapping,” where drones hover above their original victims and then strike the first responders who come to the aid of the wounded and dead, following the logic that anyone coming to the aid of someone who was

following a suspicious pattern of behavior is also following a suspicious pattern of behavior.

As deployed by the US, drones are proving to be a weapons system with little or no defensive capability, useful for assassinations, but “useless in a contested environment,” admitted the chief of the Air Force’s Air Combat Command two years ago. It may be arguable that even the possession of such weapons is illegal.

These killings are simply murders. They are acts of terror. They are crimes. It is gratifying that some in the international community and in the US are speaking out and attempting to put an end to them.

Q: Some UN officials have warned that technology is being misused as a form of “global policing”. The US government has expanded its drone operations in the recent years and taken its unpiloted aerial vehicles to areas such as Iraq, Libya and Gaza Strip. Even there’ve been cases that the American drones have flown over Iran’s airspace. Won’t such actions create mistrust between the United States and the nations in the region whose countries are subject to drone attacks?

A: The concept of any one nation taking the role of “global policing” is troubling in itself, even more so when that nation has shown such disdain for rule of law as the US has. Drone strikes, Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, torture, testing nuclear weapons on native treaty lands, all call into question the US role of world police.

The US polices the globe the same as it increasingly polices its own streets. The federal government issues attack weapons, even armored cars and tanks, to local police departments in cities large and small, and police are trained to view the people they are supposed to be protecting and serving as enemies.

With less than 5% of the world’s population, the US has more than 25% of the world’s prisoners and the prison population is disproportionately made up of people of color. Police departments in the US often arrest and all too often kill American citizens on American streets based on “racial profiling,” which is only a domestic version of the “signature strike.” Young men of certain demographics can be killed based on their “patterns of behavior” in Baltimore as in Waziristan.

A large portion of the residual US troops and contractors in Afghanistan are there to train the Afghan police! The irony of this may be lost on Americans, but not on the world community.

Q: Generally, what do you think about the civilian cost of the US government’s project of the War on Terror? It was a movement started by President Bush, and although President Obama had criticized it during the 2007 presidential debates, he continued the practices of his predecessor, including an intensive military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and maintaining the overseas detention facilities where the terrorism suspects are kept. President Obama had criticized Mr. Bush’s “foreign policy based on a flawed ideology” but it seems that he is repeating the same mistakes. What’s your perspective on that?

A: In the 2008 campaign, Barack Obama told a rally in Iowa, the state where I live, that it might actually be necessary to “bump up” the military budget beyond the record levels established by the Bush administration. The cost of bumping up the already bloated military budget is borne by the poorest people here and abroad. In several ways, Obama signaled before he was elected that he would continue some of Bush’s worst policies. These policies were not “mistakes” when Bush implemented them, they were crimes. Maintaining these policies is not a “mistake” now.

The US will not solve its domestic crises or find internal security, nor will it be able to make any contribution to the peace of the world without reordering its priorities and pursuing what Dr. Martin Luther King called a “radical revolution of values.”



Boy selling bread in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo Credit: Maya Evans

No Warlords Need Apply

--a call for credible peacemaking in Afghanistan

by Kathy Kelly and Buddy Bell

In July 2015, a spate of vicious attacks derailed expected peace talks between Afghan government officials and Taliban representatives. Some parties to the fighting may have wanted to declare a ceasefire, but very shortly after the first round of talks, held on July 7th, fighting had intensified. The Taliban, the Afghan government forces, various militias and the U.S. ramped up attacks, across Afghanistan.

The Taliban may be trying to gain territory and clout to give them leverage in eventual peace talks. Taliban forces, apparently beginning to splinter since the supposed death of Mullah Omar, are now competing with a new Islamic State presence in Afghanistan as various armed groups try to recruit new fighters from among ultra-conservative sectors of the regional population. Spectacular and frightening suicide bombings, hostage taking and a demonstrated capacity to force Afghan government soldiers into retreat or surrender might bolster a group's claim to be effectively ejecting foreigners from Afghanistan.

However, the U.S., with its history of waging aerial attacks, using helicopters and weaponized drones, and engaging in constant aerial surveillance, along with its continued night raids and detention of civilians, effectively carries itself as the most formidable and highly financed warlord in the region.

On July 19th, 2015, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Gen. John Campbell, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, and Gen. Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Following the meeting, General Dempsey said he agreed that the U.S. needed to have a transnational strategy against the Islamic State. He said he would raise Ghani's idea that Afghanistan "could serve as a hub from which the U.S., its allies and Afghanistan itself could work to prevent Islamic State from gaining followers in South Asia the way it has in the Middle East."

U.S. military officials diminish the credibility of any

proposed ceasefire when they suggest the U.S. will, after all, consider maintaining bases, troops, and drones in Afghanistan far beyond the supposed 2016 evacuation of U.S. bases. Confidence in a ceasefire is further undermined when parties to negotiations know that the U.S. could assassinate them if they appear on a list of U.S. targets.

Stopping the failed, counter-productive war against terrorism in Afghanistan and removing drones from the skies during peace talks would inspire respect for the idea of peace processes. Rural populations -- the "constituency" of the Taliban in Afghanistan-- fear the drones and look for protection, making them vulnerable to recruitment by armed militias vowing to eject the foreign militaries.

The U.S. could indicate that it doesn't wish to keep military personnel in Afghanistan or maintain ongoing bases there.

Yet, even were the U.S. to take these steps, a declared ceasefire between warlords who have, in the past, neglected the needs of Afghanistan's poorest communities, whose war-making has exacerbated suffering and poverty, may not be very meaningful to ordinary people living in rural areas. Whose interests would the warlords aim to secure?

Ordinary Afghans living in rural areas need to feed their children, plant crops, restore irrigation systems, replenish their flocks and rehabilitate their agricultural infrastructure in order to survive.

What source of funding and skill could offer the assistance required for this kind of rebuilding?

The U.S. military doesn't hesitate to demand sums for continued U.S. military presence in Afghanistan which could instead be dedicated to rebuilding the country. The U.S. should state that it wishes to pay reparations for suffering caused in the past. This could be done in the form of setting up an escrow account to be administered by an NGO or agency that has not been accused of succumbing to corruption in Afghanistan.

By doing so, the U.S. could credibly begin to withdraw from warlord status in Afghanistan, and apply itself to being part of reconstruction, setting a model desperately needed throughout the world.

VOICES

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Solution

a poem by David Smith-Ferri



Above the mouth of the Gangjeong River,
at the end of a wall
thrown like a long arm
around the naval base,
a large, open hand of razor wire
poised to snare wayward people

extends over rocks almost to the ocean.
Below, a backhoe, swinging right and left,
scoops and deposits rock at the base of a sea wall,
fortifying it.
Further out, near the port entrance, at the new limit
of the sea,
a bony steel crane, all cables and pulleys,
a sixty-foot Jurassic skeleton,
leaves the ocean forever and stands behind the break-
water
piling tetrapods.
Bulldozers scrape rock to flatten building pads.
Cement trucks, their stomachs turning,
disgorge acres of grey slurry into wooden forms.
Here, living things –
waves, winds, dolphins,
soft coral gardens, human beings –
and the people who love them
are problems the machines will solve.