

Killer Drones and WAMM's Ground All Drones Committee



Photo: DoD

Drones are in the news all across the country! Americans bought a half million drones for holiday gifts. According to the Federal Aviation Administration the gift drones aren't toys but are "aircraft" that must be registered with the federal government. Unmanned aerial vehicles—UAVs or drones—are here to stay, for monitoring climate change, photographing weddings, delivering groceries, and spying by government-sponsored agencies or private individuals. The Ground All Drones Committee of Women Against Military Madness (WAMM) decided to focus on the issues of the U.S. use of drones for assassination of targeted individuals, without regard to legal due process or international law, and the unintentional killing of people in the vicinity of the "target."

Currently, the U.S. operates two separate killer drone programs, one controlled by the CIA, the other by the military. President Obama announced two years ago that all lethal drone activity eventually would be taken over by the military. Though Congressional Intelligence Committee staffers supposedly review CIA drone attacks, some analysts express concern that similar scrutiny is not being applied to Pentagon actions.

In reality, how many people have been killed by U.S. drones throughout Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen? Accurate figures are illusive. Leah Bolger, past president of the Veterans for Peace national organization, showed a WAMM audience her photograph of a Pakistani man standing beside a tree with a bright red headscarf twisted through its branches. That scarf was the only proof he could show of his wife's death-by-drone or of her life. In areas of the world without even printed (let alone digitized) census information, no one officially can certify the birth, marriage, or death of an individual.

The "Naming the Dead" project of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism reports that, over 10 years, between 2,467 and 3,984 people were killed by CIA drones in northwestern Pakistan alone. Discrepancy in the figures is due to the impossibility

of verifying the deaths. Of the thoroughly investigated killings, 726 individuals can be reliably identified by name, age, and gender. The United Nations' definition of a child is an individual aged 0-17. We wonder, then, how many children have been killed by U.S. drone attacks throughout six countries. More than a hundred? More than a thousand? Is there a specific, turning-point number of dead children that would cause us to cry, "We have killed enough! Stop!"

WAMM people know that joining in action is vital. WAMM people move in creative ways to educate and to inspire further action to wage peace. We write letters and sign postcards and petitions to reach the President and Congress. We piece together a quilt made of fabric squares that display the tangible, visible names and ages of children killed by U.S. drone attacks.

To develop knowledge and understanding, most individuals need data and facts. Many also need the heartfelt "truth" revealed in stories and poems. The approaches will be combined in this unique event hosted by the WAMM Drone Committee:

"Facts & Truth: U.S. Drone Programs"

Tuesday, February 23, 7:00 pm

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 2730 E. 31st St., Minneapolis.

Jay Kvale, Ground All Drones committee member, will present "The Drone Papers," summarizing the cache of secret documents provided by an anonymous whistleblower to The Intercept, an alternative media source, revealing inner workings of the U.S. drone program. Sarah Hayes, local poet and artist, will read her original poems concerning drone warfare and its aftermath.

Also, please note: All are welcome to come to the WAMM Ground All Drones planning meetings on the first Thursday of each month, 4:45 to 6:00 p.m., in the WAMM office. "Drones 101" is a multimedia program that committee members will present to school and community groups. In warmer months, we staff literature tables at farmers' markets and gather in open spaces to "Fly Kites, Not Drones." Join in the fun! For additional information, call WAMM at 612-827-5364, visit the blog at groundalldrone.blogspot.com and sign up on the [facebook](#) page.

Lucia Wilkes Smith, on behalf of WAMM's Ground All Drones Committee.