

## PM: Mad Investments, Sane Divestments

By Polly Mann

On June 21, Christof Heyns, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions, at a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council organized by the ACLU, urged a worldwide moratorium on lethal autonomous robotics—also called “drones.” The ACLU has requested information about targeting policies from the Obama administration, but the request has been refused on the basis that the details are “classified.”

Heyns has expressed deep concern that, once activated, drone systems can kill targets without human handlers: “Machines lack morality and mortality and should not have life-and-death power over humans.” In a strong reproach to the U.S., Heyns is further reported to have said: “It is difficult to see how any killings carried out in 2012 can be justified as in response to [events] in 2001 ... some states seem to want to invent new laws to justify new practices.” Additionally, Heyns has stated that the targeting of rescuers (“double-tap strikes”) is a war crime.

On August 2, the BBC reported that Secretary of State John Kerry, in Pakistan, said in a television interview that the U.S. has a timeline to end drone strikes “very, very soon.” The timeline was not disclosed. At the same time, Kerry reported that “‘the threat’ [one might ask “What threat to the U.S.?”] had been eliminated and will continue to be eliminated” [italics added]. Pakistan has called for international legal action to halt drone attacks. Approximately 4,000 people have been killed by drone strikes in Pakistan alone, since 2002.

The subject of drones was first addressed at the UN Human Rights Council convention in Geneva when a report was presented to the international body on May 30. In a dialogue at this time, two dozen nations expressed concern, but “the UK was the only nation to declare its opposition to the call for a moratorium or ban on fully autonomous weapons...” ([stopkillerdrones.org](http://stopkillerdrones.org)) Are the UK and the U.S. partners in crime? Based on the fact that the UK and the U.S. share intelligence, a legal case has been lodged in London over the UK’s alleged role in the deaths of British citizens and others as a consequence of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan, according to the Guardian.

The leading military powers are moving so rapidly in the direction of drones that a preemptive ban is essential.

Drone technology has already moved closer to a fully autonomous state with the next generation drone, the X-47B, which was developed for the U.S. Navy by Northrop Grumman. Business Insider reports that it differs from previous drones in that “the mission operator monitors the X-47B air vehicle operation, but does not ‘fly’ it via remote control as is the case for other unmanned systems currently in

operation.” The X-47B is preprogrammed so that it can refuel, take off, follow a flight plan, and land without any human intervention. Its design includes two weapons bays that can hold up to 4,500 pounds of ordnance.

Yet there is resistance to these mechanized horrors. Women Against Military Madness has an active Ground All Drones Committee and recently sponsored a talk delivered by Medea Benjamin of Code Pink. An antidrone activist, Medea has participated in delegations to drone-plagued countries Pakistan and Yemen.

Along with resisting this lethal technology, we also need renewed resistance to nuclear weapons. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has announced that the five legally recognized nuclear states as defined by the nonproliferation treaty— China, France, Russia, the UK and the U.S.—are either deploying new nuclear weapons and delivery systems or planning to do so! Signatories of the nonproliferation treaty pledge to work towards nuclear disarmament. But at the beginning of this year these nations plus India, Pakistan, and Israel possessed about 4,400 operational nuclear weapons. Pakistan is expanding its main plutonium-production complex, while Israel has approximately 80 intact nuclear weapons [other estimates are 200 and up] and may also have produced nonstrategic nuclear weapons. Counting all nuclear warheads, there are now some 17,265 nuclear weapons in the world today.

Global Research reported on July 25 that, according to ArmsControl.org, the United States, in all, “possesses 5,113 nuclear warheads, including tactical, strategic, and non-deployed weapons.”

World military expenditures in 2012, SIPRI states, have been \$1,756 trillion, representing which amounts to \$249 for each person in the world.

But the shareholders of the corporations that benefit from military expenditures are obviously happy with their investments. The workers who make such weapons, without question, are happy that they have employment and can feed their families, the politicians whose coffers are enriched by campaign contributions from the weapons corporations are happy for their largesse, the military establishment which protects these corporate interests is grateful for its allotments, and soldiers who supply the male/female/power for the military are grateful for jobs which are in short supply. In the meantime, the planet is being polluted beyond the point of return and the income of the people is being distributed in ways that increase the division between the rich and the poor; 400 families possess half the wealth of the United States. U.S. citizens pay more for health care than those of all the European countries and the quality of that care is ranked far below. Hunger is rife. Fifty million Americans are known to be hungry every day. Homelessness has increased 60 percent during the last year and college students are facing huge debts.

So, while we are on the subject of unhappy investment, how about something to be hopeful about—the happier news on divestment? But first, some background:

The Bedouins living in Israel have been living in the Naqab area of Israel for centuries. They are indigenous to the area just as the Native Americans are indigenous to the United States. They occupy tens of thousands of acres of land in the Naqab, and the Israeli government seeks to confiscate this land to expand Jewish-only settlements. This is the concern of U.S. citizens because Israel is the top recipient of U.S. foreign aid—it has been allotted more than \$30 billion over 10 years, and the U.S. has partnered with Israel on military training, intelligence gathering, provided weapons delivery for some time, and allowed settlements on Palestinian land to continue while talking about a peace process, which is disingenuous, to say the least.

The confiscation of land in the Naqab is what is called the “Prawer Plan,” which has been introduced into the Israeli parliament, the Knesset. The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) of Palestine is calling upon the Inter-Parliamentary Union to freeze the Knesset’s membership until it repeals all racist laws—laws that are inconsistent with international law and the principles and objectives of the United Nations.

In 2005, the BDS Campaign was initiated against corporations and other entities doing business in Israel to either 1) boycott, 2) sell their Israeli investments, or 3) apply sanctions against that country until it complies with international law and grants Palestinians their civil rights. As with so many other attempts at forcing a recalcitrant nation to “do the right thing” it is taking some time for the desired result to be achieved. But hooray! hooray! Even Thomas Friedman, ever the advocate for Israel, admitted in his New York Times column that the BDS movement “is creating a powerful surge of international opinion, particularly in Europe and on college campuses.”

Also, Yedioth Ahronoth’s Nahum Barnea, the most influential print journalist in Israel, wrote that the Magen David Adom ambulance service, the national branch of the Red Cross, is under pressure from the U.S., British, French, Dutch, and Norwegian branches to stay out of the West Bank, where it handles the Jewish settlements. Recently Itamar Rabinovich, former president of Tel Aviv University and ambassador to the U.S. under Rabin, reportedly told Forward Magazine that the boycott movement has been “gathering volume,” especially since world-famous British physicist Stephen Hawking withdrew from an academic conference because it was to be held in Israel.

The influential Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz reported that a group of top Israeli businesspeople, led by high-tech patriarch Yossi Vardi, warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the status quo with the Palestinians had caused a global cooling toward the country economically. The Palestinian BDS National Committee reported on July 18 that the EU acknowledges an obligation not to recognize Israeli colonization and annexation of occupied Palestinian territory and to stop loans to “virtually all” major Israeli businesses and public bodies. It seems that the BDS

Campaign is bearing fruit and that the fear of economic reprisals is pushing Israel closer to granting equality to the Palestinians. Polly Mann is a founder of Women Against Military Madness and continues to be active with the organization. She serves on the WAMM Newsletter Committee and writes a regular column..

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Poster from a 2014 Conference on Legal Policy and Robotics. UN special rapporteur Christof Heyns warns that “some states [nation-states] want to invent new laws to justify their practices.”