

To the Editor February 3, 2020

Stop the Endless Wars

In the eighteenth year of using the excuse of training the Afghan Army, it has long since worn itself out. Just as it did in Vietnam. When has this country ever helped establish a foreign democratic government and trained its military to protect itself? The next time will be the first time, I believe.

Are the killing of civilians in our wars, estimated to be approx. 800,00 people since 9/11, an act of empire building rather than country building?

Ending poverty and hopelessness around the world are the real solutions. It is a lot cheaper to feed, rather than kill people. All those years ago, John Lennon wrote:

*Imagine there's no countries, It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for, And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace
You may say I'm a dreamer, But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us, And the world will be as one*

So, let's tell the truth about America. The truth is that, through our worldwide aerial drone and conventional manned aircraft air wars, we've invented a new form of terror for millions of people across the world. This is our current international legacy.

One of the first attacks by an armed U.S. drone took place in Afghanistan in February 2002. Three men were walking in the mountains. One of them looked tall, and someone at the CIA thought he might be Osama bin Laden. So we killed all three of them. It turned out they were extremely poor local civilians looking for scrap metal to sell from previous American airstrikes.

Three days after taking office, Pres. Obama approved a strike in Pakistan. According to the book "Kill or Capture," it hit the wrong target: the home of a village elder who belonged to a "pro-government peace committee." He was killed, along with four other members of his family, two of them his children. One leaked document revealed that according to the Pentagon's own numbers, nine out of 10 people killed in "Operation Haymaker" in Afghanistan during a five-month period were not the "intended targets."

The truth is that there have been six presidential candidate debates this year, and the number of times our worldwide drone war was debated is zero.

This year, in response to an American Civil Liberties Union survey, Sanders answered that he would issue an executive order prohibiting the CIA from conducting drone strikes, giving the responsibility exclusively to the military.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., went further, explaining that "we must also dramatically curtail their use, institute protections to prevent civilian casualties; and provide maximum transparency when they do occur."

South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg responded that he would not forbid the CIA from conducting drone strikes because “it is imprudent to be unflinchingly categorical when it comes to dynamic national security challenges.”

Former Vice President Joe Biden did not answer the survey at all.

It’s possible that you heard about a recent U.S. drone strike in eastern Afghanistan. A 25-year-old Afghan woman there had recently given birth to her second child. When she developed postpartum complications at home, her family took her in a car to a clinic. On their way back home, all five were killed by an American missile launched from a weaponized drone. All were burned to ashes.

The truth that is our fleet of killer drones is likely aloft right now, circling endlessly as intelligence analysts decide whether to pronounce a death sentence on people thousands of miles away. Eighteen years after September 11, 2001, drones hover in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Niger, Syria, and Libya:

Once upon a time, humans killed each other with rocks, close up. Then swords and knives, then guns, then planes. But even with bombing campaigns of the past, there were humans up there, and eventually they had to fly away. Today, many countries live underneath drones monitoring them around the clock. Their constant, distant humming quietly informs the people beneath them that they and everyone around them might be killed at any time by invisible strangers across an ocean.

Please, though, do what you can to consider these truths about ourselves. Try to face the reality that there are people on the other side of the world today that, because of us, are experiencing a type of dread that has never existed in America. Try to imagine being surrounded by your family, all of you filled with acid anxiety about the buzzing far overhead, the persistent staring eye above your home, that may at any moment obliterate you and everything you love.¹

This is what is being done by our government...in our names.

“You talk of times of peace for all, then prepare for war. “Midnight Oil - Blosson & Blood Lyrics

¹ Elise Swain and Jon Schwarz <https://theintercept.com/2019/12/25/merry-christmas-us-drone-strikes/>