ROBOT, DRONE AIR WAR Newsletter #3, February 16, 2012
Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace

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The newsletters cover the fields of pje.

KNOWLEDGE THEN ACTION

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Washington Post: “Under Obama, an emerging global apparatus for drone killing,”
Just Foreign Policy, Dec. 28, 2011
Other commanders in chief have presided over wars with far higher casualty counts. But no president
has ever relied so extensively on the secret killing of individuals. 

“America’s Secret Empire of Drone Bases: 
Its Full Extent Revealed for the First Time” By Nick Turse

They increasingly dot the planet. There’s a facility outside Las Vegas where “pilots” work in climate-controlled trailers, another at a dusty camp in Africa formerly used by the French Foreign Legion, a third at a big air base in Afghanistan where Air Force personnel sit in front of multiple computer screens, and a fourth at an air base in the United Arab Emirates that almost no one talks about.

And that leaves at least 56 more such facilities to mention in an expanding American empire of unmanned drone bases being set up worldwide. Despite frequent news reports on the drone assassination campaign launched in support of America’s ever-widening undeclared wars and a spate of stories on drone bases in Africa and the Middle East, most of these facilities have remained unnoted, uncounted, and remarkably anonymous -- until now.

Run by the military, the Central Intelligence Agency, and their proxies, these bases -- some little more than desolate airstrips, others sophisticated command and control centers filled with computer screens and high-tech electronic equipment -- are the backbone of a new American robotic way of war. They are also the latest development in a long-evolving saga of American power projection abroad -- in this case, remote-controlled strikes anywhere on the planet with a minimal foreign “footprint” and little accountability.

Using military documents, press accounts, and other open source information, an in-depth analysis by TomDispatch has identified at least 60 bases integral to U.S. military and CIA drone operations. There may, however, be more, since a cloak of secrecy about drone warfare leaves the full size and scope of these bases distinctly in the shadows.

A Galaxy of Bases

Over the last decade, the American use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and unmanned aerial systems (UAS) has expanded exponentially, as has media coverage of their use. On September 21st, the Wall Street Journal reported that the military has deployed missile-armed MQ-9 Reaper drones on the “island nation of Seychelles to intensify attacks on al Qaeda affiliates, particularly in Somalia.” A day earlier, a Washington Post piece also mentioned the same base on the tiny Indian Ocean archipelago, as well as one in the African nation of Djibouti, another under construction in Ethiopia, and a secret CIA airstrip being built for drones in an unnamed Middle Eastern country. (Some suspect it's Saudi Arabia.)
Post journalists Greg Miller and Craig Whitlock reported that the “Obama administration is assembling a constellation of secret drone bases for counterterrorism operations in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula as part of a newly aggressive campaign to attack al-Qaeda affiliates in Somalia and Yemen.” Within days, the Post also reported that a drone from the new CIA base in that unidentified Middle Eastern country had carried out the assassination of radical al-Qaeda preacher and American citizen Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen.

With the killing of al-Awlaki, the Obama Administration has expanded its armed drone campaign to no fewer than six countries, though the CIA, which killed al-Awlaki, refuses to officially acknowledge its drone assassination program. The Air Force is less coy about its drone operations, yet there are many aspects of those, too, that remain in the shadows. Air Force spokesman Lieutenant Colonel John Haynes recently told TomDispatch that, “for operational security reasons, we do not discuss worldwide operating locations of Remotely Piloted Aircraft, to include numbers of locations around the world.”

Still, those 60 military and CIA bases worldwide, directly connected to the drone program, tell us much about America’s war-making future. From command and control and piloting to maintenance and arming, these facilities perform key functions that allow drone campaigns to continue expanding, as they have for more than a decade. Other bases are already under construction or in the planning stages. When presented with our list of Air Force sites within America’s galaxy of drone bases, Lieutenant Colonel Haynes responded, “I have nothing further to add to what I’ve already said.”

Even in the face of government secrecy, however, much can be discovered. Here, then, for the record is a TomDispatch accounting of America’s drone bases in the United States and around the world.

The Near Abroad

News reports have frequently focused on Creech Air Force Base outside Las Vegas as ground zero in America’s military drone campaign. Sitting in darkened, air-conditioned rooms 7,500 miles from Afghanistan, drone pilots dressed in flight suits remotely control MQ-9 Reapers and their progenitors, the less heavily-armed MQ-1 Predators. Beside them, sensor operators manipulate the TV camera, infrared camera, and other high-tech sensors on board the plane. Their faces are lit up by digital displays showing video feeds from the battle zone. By squeezing a trigger on a joystick, one of those Air Force “pilots” can loose a Hellfire missile on a person half a world away.

While Creech gets the lion’s share of media attention -- it even has its own drones on site -- numerous other bases on U.S. soil have played critical roles in America’s drone wars. The same video-game-style warfare is carried out by U.S and British pilots not far away at Nevada’s Nellis Air Force Base, the home of the Air Force’s 2nd Special Operations Squadron (SOS). According to a factsheet provided to TomDispatch by the Air Force, the 2nd SOS and its drone operators are scheduled to be relocated to the Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field in Florida in the coming months.
Reapers or Predators are also being flown from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, March Air Reserve Base in California, Springfield Air National Guard Base in Ohio, Cannon Air Force Base and Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, Ellington Airport in Houston, Texas, the Air National Guard base in Fargo, North Dakota, Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, and Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in Syracuse, New York. Recently, it was announced that Reapers flown by Hancock’s pilots would begin taking off on training missions from the Army’s Fort Drum, also in New York State.

Meanwhile, at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, according to a report by the New York Times, teams of camouflage-clad Air Force analysts sit in a secret intelligence and surveillance installation monitoring cell-phone intercepts, high-altitude photographs, and most notably, multiple screens of streaming live video from drones in Afghanistan. They call it “Death TV” and are constantly instant-messaging with and talking to commanders on the ground in order to supply them with real-time intelligence on enemy troop movements. Air Force analysts also closely monitor the battlefield from Air Force Special Operations Command in Florida and a facility in Terre Haute, Indiana.

CIA drone operators also reportedly pilot their aircraft from the Agency’s nearby Langley, Virginia headquarters. It was from here that analysts apparently watched footage of Osama bin Laden’s compound in Pakistan, for example, thanks to video sent back by the RQ-170 Sentinel, an advanced drone nicknamed the “Beast of Kandahar.” According to Air Force documents, the Sentinel is flown from both Creech Air Force Base and Tonopah Test Range in Nevada.

Predators, Reapers, and Sentinels are just part of the story. At Beale Air Force Base in California, Air Force personnel pilot the RQ-4 Global Hawk, an unmanned drone used for long-range, high-altitude surveillance missions, some of them originating from Anderson Air Force Base in Guam (a staging ground for drone flights over Asia). Other Global Hawks are stationed at Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota, while the Aeronautical Systems Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio manages the Global Hawk as well as the Predator and Reaper programs for the Air Force.

Other bases have been intimately involved in training drone operators, including Randolph Air Force Base in Texas and New Mexico’s Kirtland Air Force Base, as is the Army’s Fort Huachuca in Arizona, which is home to “the world’s largest UAV training center,” according to a report by National Defense magazine. There, hundreds of employees of defense giant General Dynamics train military personnel to fly smaller tactical drones like the Hunter and the Shadow. The physical testing of drones goes on at adjoining Libby Army Airfield and “two UAV runways located approximately four miles west of Libby,” according to Global Security, an on-line clearinghouse for military information.

Additionally, small drone training for the Army is carried out at Fort Benning in Georgia while at Fort Rucker, Alabama -- “the home of Army aviation” -- the Unmanned Aircraft Systems program
coordinates doctrine, strategy, and concepts pertaining to UAVs. Recently, Fort Benning also saw the early testing of true robotic drones -- which fly without human guidance or a hand on any joystick. This, wrote the Washington Post, is considered the next step toward a future in which drones will “hunt, identify, and kill the enemy based on calculations made by software, not decisions made by humans.”

The Army has also carried out UAV training exercises at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah and, earlier this year, the Navy launched its X-47B, a next-generation semi-autonomous stealth drone, on its first flight at Edwards Air Force Base in California. That flying robot -- designed to operate from the decks of aircraft carriers -- has since been sent on to Maryland’s Naval Air Station Patuxent River for further testing. At nearby Webster Field, the Navy worked out kinks in its Fire Scout pilotless helicopter, which has also been tested at Fort Rucker and Yuma Proving Ground in Arizona, as well as Florida’s Mayport Naval Station and Jacksonville Naval Air Station. The latter base was also where the Navy’s Broad Area Maritime Surveillance (BAMS) unmanned aerial system was developed. It is now based there and at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Washington State.

**Foreign Jewels in the Crown**

The Navy is actively looking for a suitable site in the Western Pacific for a BAMS base, and is currently in talks with several Persian Gulf states about a site in the Middle East. It already has Global Hawks perched at its base in Sigonella, Italy.

The Air Force is now negotiating with Turkey to relocate some of the Predator drones still operating in Iraq to the giant air base at Incirlik next year. Many different UAVs have been based in Iraq since the American invasion of that country, including small tactical models like the Raven-B that troops launched by hand from Kirkuk Regional Air Base, Shadow UAVs that flew from Forward Operating Base Normandy in Baqubah Province, Predators operating out of Balad Airbase, miniature Desert Hawk drones launched from Tallil Air Base, and Scan Eagles based at Al Asad Air Base.

Elsewhere in the Greater Middle East, according to Aviation Week, the military is launching Global Hawks from Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates, piloted by personnel stationed at Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland, to track “shipping traffic in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Arabian Sea.” There are unconfirmed reports that the CIA may be operating drones from the Emirates as well. In the past, other UAVs have apparently been flown from Kuwait’s Ali Al Salem Air Base and Al Jaber Air Base, as well as Seeb Air Base in Oman.

At Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the Air Force runs an air operations command and control facility, critical to the drone wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The new secret CIA base on the Arabian peninsula, used to assassinate Anwar al-Awlaki, may or may not be the airstrip in Saudi Arabia whose existence a senior U.S. military official recently confirmed to Fox News. In the past, the CIA has also
operated UAVs out of Tuzel, Uzbekistan.

In neighboring Afghanistan, drones fly from many bases including Jalalabad Air Base, Kandahar Air Field, the air base at Bagram, Camp Leatherneck, Camp Dwyer, Combat Outpost Payne, Forward Operating Base (FOB) Edinburgh and FOB Delaram II, to name a few. Afghan bases are, however, more than just locations where drones take off and land.

It is a common misconception that U.S.-based operators are the only ones who “fly” America’s armed drones. In fact, in and around America’s war zones, UAVs begin and end their flights under the control of local “pilots.” Take Afghanistan’s massive Bagram Air Base. After performing preflight checks alongside a technician who focuses on the drone’s sensors, a local airman sits in front of a Dell computer tower and multiple monitors, two keyboards, a joystick, a throttle, a rollerball, a mouse, and various switches, overseeing the plane’s takeoff before handing it over to a stateside counterpart with a similar electronics set-up. After the mission is complete, the controls are transferred back to the local operators for the landing. Additionally, crews in Afghanistan perform general maintenance and repairs on the drones.

In the wake of a devastating suicide attack by an al-Qaeda double agent that killed CIA officers and contractors at Forward Operating Base Chapman in Afghanistan’s eastern province of Khost in 2009, it came to light that the facility was heavily involved in target selection for drone strikes across the border in Pakistan. The drones themselves, as the Washington Post noted at the time, were “flown from separate bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

Both the Air Force and the CIA have conducted operations in Pakistani air space, with some missions originating in Afghanistan and others from inside Pakistan. In 2006, images of what appear to be Predator drones stationed at Shamsi Air Base in Pakistan's Balochistan province were found on Google Earth and later published. In 2009, the New York Times reported that operatives from Xe Services, the company formerly known as Blackwater, had taken over the task of arming Predator drones at the CIA’s “hidden bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan.”

Following the May Navy SEAL raid into Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden, that country’s leaders reportedly ordered the United States to leave Shamsi. The Obama administration evidently refused and word leaked out, according to the Washington Post, that the base was actually owned and sublet to the U.S. by the United Arab Emirates, which had built the airfield “as an arrival point for falconry and other hunting expeditions in Pakistan.”

The U.S. and Pakistani governments have since claimed that Shamsi is no longer being used for drone strikes. True or not, the U.S. evidently also uses other Pakistani bases for its drones, including possibly PAF Base Shahbaz, located near the city of Jacobabad, and another base located near Ghazi.
The New Scramble for Africa

Recently, the headline story, when it comes to the expansion of the empire of drone bases, has been Africa. For the last decade, the U.S. military has been operating out of Camp Lemonier, a former French Foreign Legion base in the tiny African nation of Djibouti. Not long after the attacks of September 11, 2001, it became a base for Predator drones and has since been used to conduct missions over neighboring Somalia.

For some time, rumors have also been circulating about a secret American base in Ethiopia. Recently, a U.S. official revealed to the Washington Post that discussions about a drone base there had been underway for up to four years, “but that plan was delayed because ‘the Ethiopians were not all that jazzed.’” Now construction is evidently underway, if not complete.

Then, of course, there is that base on the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean. A small fleet of Navy and Air Force drones began operating openly there in 2009 to track pirates in the region’s waters. Classified diplomatic cables obtained by Wikileaks, however, reveal that those drones have also secretly been used to carry out missions in Somalia. “Based in a hangar located about a quarter-mile from the main passenger terminal at the airport,” the Post reports, the base consists of three or four “Reapers and about 100 U.S. military personnel and contractors, according to the cables.”

The U.S. has also recently sent four smaller tactical drones to the African nations of Uganda and Burundi for use by those countries’ militaries.

New and Old Empires

Even if the Pentagon budget were to begin to shrink, expansion of America’s empire of drone bases is a sure thing in the years to come. Drones are now the bedrock of Washington’s future military planning and -- with counterinsurgency out of favor -- the preferred way of carrying out wars abroad.

During the eight years of George W. Bush’s presidency, as the U.S. was building up its drone fleets, the country launched wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and carried out limited strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia, using drones in at least four of those countries. In less than three years under President Obama, the U.S. has launched drone strikes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen. It maintains that it has carte blanche to kill suspected enemies in any nation (or at least any nation in the global south).

According to a report by the Congressional Budget Office published earlier this year, “the Department of Defense plans to purchase about 730 new medium-sized and large unmanned aircraft systems” over the next decade. In practical terms, this means more drones like the Reaper.

Military officials told the Wall Street Journal that the Reaper “can fly 1,150 miles from base, conduct
missions, and return home… [T]he time a drone can stay aloft depends on how heavily armed it is.”

According to a drone operator training document obtained by TomDispatch, at maximum payload, meaning with 3,750 pounds worth of Hellfire missiles and GBU-12 or GBU-30 bombs on board, the Reaper can remain aloft for 16 to 20 hours.

Even a glance at a world map tells you that, if the U.S. is to carry out ever more drone strikes across the developing world, it will need more bases for its future UAVs. As an unnamed senior military official pointed out to a Washington Post reporter, speaking of all those new drone bases clustered around the Somali and Yemeni war zones, “If you look at it geographically, it makes sense -- you get out a ruler and draw the distances [drones] can fly and where they take off from.”

Earlier this year, an analysis by TomDispatch determined that there are more than 1,000 U.S. military bases scattered across the globe -- a shadowy base-world providing plenty of existing sites that can, and no doubt will, host drones. But facilities selected for a pre-drone world may not always prove optimal locations for America’s current and future undeclared wars and assassination campaigns. So further expansion in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia is a likelihood.

What are the Air Force’s plans in this regard? Lieutenant Colonel John Haynes was typically circumspect, saying, “We are constantly evaluating potential operating locations based on evolving mission needs.” If the last decade is any indication, those “needs” will only continue to grow.

Nick Turse is a historian, essayist, and investigative journalist. The associate editor of TomDispatch.com and a senior editor at Alternet.org, his latest book is The Case for Withdrawal from Afghanistan (Verso Books). This article marks another of Turse’s joint Alternet/TomDispatch investigative reports on U.S. national security policy and the American empire. Copyright 2011 Nick Turse

“The Civilian Victims of the CIA's Drone War,” Clive Stafford Smith, Guardian UK

August 12, 2011

Clive Stafford Smith reports: "This week, a new report from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism gives us the best picture yet of the impact of the CIA's drone war in Pakistan. The CIA claims that there has been not one 'non-combatant' killed in the past year. This claim always seemed to be biased advocacy rather than honest fact."


KILLING CHILDREN

“168 Children Killed in Pakistan Drone Strikes Campaign

Rob Crilly, The Telegraph UK

Excerpt: "As many as 168 children have been killed in drone strikes in Pakistan during the past seven years as the CIA has intensified its secret program against militants along the Afghan border....
strikes, which began under President George W Bush but have since accelerated during the presidency of Barack Obama, are hated in Pakistan, where families live in fear of the bright specks that appear to hover in the sky overhead.


From Just Foreign Policy News, August 12, 2011

3) As many as 168 children have been killed in CIA drone strikes in Pakistan during the past seven years, the Telegraph reports. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that 2,292 people in Pakistan have been killed by US drone strikes, including as many as 775 civilians.

4) The CIA claims that there has been not one "non-combatant" killed in the past year, notes Clive Stafford Smith in the Guardian. The BIJ's study is everything that the CIA version of events is not: transparent, drawn from as many credible sources as possible and essentially open. "The injured who survive with their severed limbs, they often tell me, 'you cannot really call me lucky','" says the lawyer for a teenager who lost both his legs in a drone strike. "This is not London or Islamabad. There are no facilities for the

**Drones in Pakistan: Equal Time for Killers?**


The *New York Times* has a long piece (8/12/11) looking at the question of how many civilians in Pakistan are killed by CIA drones. The agency doesn't even speak about the program on the record, except to make the far-fetched claim that no civilians have died in the past year or so.

The article, written by Scott Shane, includes some useful criticism of the CIA, and it's hard not to conclude that the agency's claims are not very credible.

But the real problem with the piece is that it gives much weight to the CIA's defense at all, using their almost entirely anonymous claims as one side in a dispute:

The government's assertion of zero collateral deaths meets with deep skepticism from many independent experts. And a new report from the British Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which conducted interviews in Pakistan's tribal area, concluded that at least 45 civilians were killed in 10 strikes during the last year.

Shane writes that a "closer look at the competing claims... suggests reasons to doubt the precision and certainty of the agency's civilian death count." He adds, though, that "if there are doubts about the CIA claim, there are also questions about the reliability of critics' reports of noncombatant deaths."

Shane also reports that "American officials" do not trust Pakistani lawyer Mirza Shahzad Akbar, who has been a key player and is suing the CIA-- which apparently discredits the British Bureau of Investigative Journalism study:

American officials said the Bureau of Investigative Journalism report was suspect because it relied in part on information supplied by Mr. Akbar, who publicly named the CIA's undercover Pakistan station chief in December when announcing his legal campaign against the drones.

If you read some of the British press about this study (as I did, thanks to CommonDreams.org), you get a very different impression than the one you get from the *New York Times*. From the *Telegraph*: 
168 Children Killed in Drone Strikes in Pakistan Since Start of Campaign

New research to send shockwaves through Pakistan
by Rob Crilly, Islamabad

In an extensive analysis of open-source documents, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism found that 2,292 people had been killed by U.S. missiles, including as many as 775 civilians.

An opinion piece at the Guardian:

The Civilian Victims of the CIA's Drone War

A new study gives us the truest picture yet--in contrast to the CIA's own account--of drones' grim toll of 'collateral damage'
by Clive Stafford Smith

In that piece, Smith writes:

This week, a new report from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism gives us the best picture yet of the impact of the CIA's drone war in Pakistan. The CIA claims that there has been not one "noncombatant" killed in the past year. This claim always seemed to be biased advocacy rather than honest fact. Indeed, the Guardian recently published some of the pictures we have obtained of the aftermath of drone strikes. There were photos of a child called Naeem Ullah killed in Datta Khel and two kids in Piranho, both within the timeframe of the CIA's dubious declaration.

The BIJ reporting begins to fill in the actual numbers. It's a bleak view: more people killed than previously thought, including an estimated 160 children overall. This study should help to create a greater sense of reality around what is going on in these remote regions of Pakistan. This is precisely what has been lacking in the one-sided reporting of the issue--and it doesn't take an intelligence analyst to realize that vague and one-sided is just the way the CIA wants to keep it.

The Times account obeys normal journalistic "rules" about balance and giving official sources their say. Which, in this case, amounts to giving space to anonymous killers to defend their actions.

Tags: CIA, drones, Guardian, Pakistan, Scott Shane, Telegraph

disabled in Waziristan; such people can have zero opportunities ahead of them in life."

Tara McKelvey reports: "On July 18, Pakistani lawyer Mirza Shahzad Akbar, working with Smith, filed a formal complaint, or a First Information Report, in a police station in Islamabad, accusing Rizzo of murder and war crimes. The written complaint holds him responsible for the death of an 8-year-old boy, the son of Maezol Khan, who was killed by a missile early in the morning on February 14, 2009,
while he was sleeping in a courtyard of his house in the town of Makeen, Pakistan."


Former Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Dennis Blair strongly criticized the administration's reliance on drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, Politico reports. Blair said the administration should curtail drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia because the missiles are fueling anti-American sentiment and undercutting reform efforts in those countries. "We're alienating the countries concerned, because we're treating countries just as places where we go attack groups that threaten us. We are threatening the prospects for long-term reform raised by the Arab Spring," Blair said.  Ex-DNI rips Obama White House. Josh Gerstein, Politico, July 29, 2011  http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0711/60199.html

OBAMA'S DRONE WAR
Support Group: Documenting the Peace Laureate's Progressive Atrocities
Written by Chris Floyd  (via Cindy Sheehan’s Soapbox)
Sunday, 17 July 2011 23:11
http://www.chris-floyd.com/component/content/article/1-latest-news/2150-support-group-documenting-the-peace-laureate-s-progressive-atrocities.html

Do you support the policies and political fortunes of President Barack Obama, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate? Then this is what you support: cowardly, cold-blooded mass murder.
You support mass murder. You support the shredding to pieces of innocent people, many of them children, week after week, month after month. You support the murder of children. You support the cultivation of extremism and hatred: hatred aimed at you, and your children, for the mass murder -- the state terrorism -- committed in your name by your progressive president. You support extremism. You support hatred. You support terrorism.

The Guardian tells the remarkable story of Noor Behram, who for three years has been rushing to the scene of the long-distance, remote-control drone strikes launched by the Peace Laureate against undefended villages in Pakistan. Braving roadblocks, suspicious (and shell-shocked) locals, and secondary strikes -- like terrorists the world over, the Laureate's Droners like to draw people to the site of one strike, then fire another at those who've come to help the first victims -- Noor Behram has taken his camera to some 60 killing fields in North and South Waziristan. As the Guardian notes:

Noor Behram says his painstaking work has uncovered an important – and unreported – truth about the US drone campaign in Pakistan's tribal region: that far more civilians are being injured or dying than the Americans and Pakistanis admit. The world's media quickly reports on how many militants were killed in each strike. But reporters don't go to the spot, relying on unnamed Pakistani intelligence officials. Noor
Behram believes you have to go to the spot to figure out whether those killed were really extremists or ordinary people living in Waziristan. And he's in no doubt.

"For every 10 to 15 people killed, maybe they get one militant," he said. "I don't go to count how many Taliban are killed. I go to count how many children, women, innocent people, are killed." ...

According to Noor Behram, the strikes not only kill the innocent but injure untold numbers and radicalise the population. "There are just pieces of flesh lying around after a strike. You can't find bodies. So the locals pick up the flesh and curse America. They say that America is killing us inside our own country, inside our own homes, and only because we are Muslims.

"The youth in the area surrounding a strike gets crazed. Hatred builds up inside those who have seen a drone attack. The Americans think it is working, but the damage they're doing is far greater."

Even when the drones hit the right compound, the force of the blast is such that neighbours' houses, often made of baked mud, are also demolished, crushing those inside, said Noor Behram. One of the photographs shows a tangle of debris he said were the remains of five houses blitzed together.

Do you support this? Do you support the progressive president, the Peace Laureate? Then this is what you support:

The photographs make for difficult viewing and leave no doubt about the destructive power of the Hellfire missiles unleashed: a boy with the top of his head missing, a severed hand, flattened houses, the parents of children killed in a strike. The chassis is all that remains of a car in one photo, another shows the funeral of a seven-year-old child. There are pictures, too, of the cheap rubber flip-flops worn by children and adults, which often survive: signs that life once existed there. A 10-year-old boy's body, prepared for burial, shows lipstick on him and flowers in his hair – a mother's last loving touch.

If you support the president, this is what you support. (And yes, if you support his so-called opponents in our bipartisan militarized state -- where the only political "issue" is how much more we can give to the rich while expanding our state terror overseas -- this is what you support as well.) A boy with the top of his head torn off. From a thunderbolt of metal and explosives hurled at him from thousands of miles away. Is this what you support?

Or maybe that's the wrong question. If you support the president, it's obvious that you do support this. I suppose a better question is the one that Arthur Silber has been asking, over and over, for years, as the Atrocity Machine of the rightwing Bush regime morphed effortlessly into the Atrocity Machine of the progressive Peace Laureate:

Why do you support this? Why do you support it? Why do you support?

NEW DRONE BASE IN YEMEN

What WaPo Won't Tell You About CIA's Yemen Drone Base

07/27/2011 by Peter Hart

In a piece today, the Washington Post's Greg Miller reports on a CIA base that will be used to conduct drone strikes in Yemen:

The agency is building a desert airstrip so that it can begin flying armed drones over Yemen. The
facility, which is scheduled to be completed in September, is designed to shield the CIA's aircraft, and their sophisticated surveillance equipment, from observers at busier regional military hubs such as Djibouti, where the JSOC drones are based.

The Washington Post is withholding the specific location of the CIA facility at the administration's request.

The existence of the base has been reported elsewhere--the New York Times noted on June 15 that an "American official would not disclose the country where the CIA base was being built." The Times pointed out that the shift to CIA control was important, since with "the operations under CIA control, they could be carried out as a 'covert action,' which can be undertaken without the support of the host government." Meaning the U.S. could bomb Yemen without the approval of Yemen's government, in the event that the current government were to fall.

The story seemed to have been broken by the Associated Press (6/14/11), which, like the Post, is not telling readers what it knows about the base: "The Associated Press has withheld the exact location at the request of U.S. officials."

This is reminiscent of the Post's decision in 2005 to report on CIA secret prisons ("black sites") in Eastern Europe--without disclosing the location of those sites, where terrorism suspects were taken to be interrogated (Extra! Update, 12/05).

It obviously makes senses for any White House to want to keep its secret programs under wraps--particularly when there's a chance that laws are being broken, or civilians are being killed. (Recall that the U.S. Navy launched a cruise missile loaded with cluster bombs into Yemen in 2009, reportedly killing 41 civilians.)

It does not make sense, however, for news outlets to assist them in these efforts.

UNMANNED AIRCRAFT DEVELOPMENT
From Just Foreign Policy News, August 12, 2011

5) A test flight of an experimental "Prompt Global Strike" aircraft ended prematurely when it lost contact and crashed into the sea, the Los Angeles Times reports. Brian Weeden, a former Air Force officer and expert in space security, questioned whether the program could survive upcoming cuts in Pentagon spending. "All of this money is being spent to kill someone very quickly," he said. "All that seems to have come out of it is that the technology is costly and difficult to achieve."

6) An Air Force official said the service has slashed by 10 percent the costs to use its Global Hawk unmanned aircraft, weeks after senators sharply questioned the price, The Hill reports. Winslow Wheeler of the Center for Defense Information said the GAO should examine the claim. The Pentagon's testing and evaluation office says the Global Hawk program's overall price tag is $8.6
billion.

“Homegrown, violent extremism starts at the top. “
From Cindy Sheehan’s Soapbox
Dear Friend,
Of course, on September 30th—lovers of true peace and true justice were slapped in the face again by US Imperial Decree. "Radical Muslim Cleric," Anwar al Awlaki was extra-judicially murdered by his own government in Yemen. I was listening to CiaNN this morning and I was told that USAians needed to be on high alert because there could be retaliation for al Awlaki's murder by "homegrown, violent extremists.” One person's extremist is another person's President and no matter what we think of a person's guilt or innocence, his/her religious beliefs, or his/her rhetoric, that person is guaranteed a) freedom of speech and association; and b) a trial before the law. For Pete's sake, innocent people are murdered by the state all the time (a la Troy Davis) even when that due process is followed.

Back in 2010, Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox did two shows on this theme, one with Constitutional expert and attorney, Glenn Greenwald and on with the attorney for Awlaki's father, Maria LaHood from the Center for Constitutional Rights. Click this link to check the shows out. This is a great article by Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights about the killing of September 30th. Cynthia McKinney is the guest for our new show this week. Cynthia and I chat about US/NATO crimes in Libya. Tune in tomorrow (or anytime after) at 2pm pacific to listen to this great show at Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox.