OMNI DRONE NEWSLETTER #4. MAY 3, 2012.
Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace (Newsletter #1, Dec. 29, 2010; #2 July 20, 2011; #3 Feb. 16, 2012.) See Newsletters on Assassinations, Killing Civilians, International Law, Air War, War Crimes, Surveillance, Pakistan War, Civil Liberties.

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The newsletters cover the fields of pje. KNOWLEDGE THEN ACTION

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U.S. official acknowledges drone strikes, says civilian deaths 'exceedingly rare'
Michael Isikoff, NBC News, April 30


*Action: Urge John Brennan to Tell the Whole Truth about CIA drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan, JustForeignPolicy, May 2, 2012*

On Monday, White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan claimed that "the United States government conducts targeted strikes against specific al-Qaeda terrorists." What Brennan didn't say was that the CIA has launched drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen without knowing who would be killed, against people who are not on any list of "suspected terrorists," on the basis that according to U.S. intelligence, their behavior fits a profile of "suspected terrorist." U.S. officials have said that these "signature strikes" increase the risk of killing civilians, as well as the risk of killing people who have no dispute with the United States. Law professor Bruce Ackerman has argued that such strikes in Yemen are not legal under the 2001 AUMF, contrary to Brennan's claims.

Urge John Brennan to tell the whole truth about CIA drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan by signing our petition. We will hand-deliver the petition when Brennan speaks at the Fordham University commencement in New York City on May 19.

http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/act/brennan-petition
Additional information: White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan characterized civilian deaths from U.S. drone strikes as "exceedingly rare," NBC reports. But a new analysis by the New America Foundation estimates that more than 300 civilians have been killed by drones since Obama took office. NAF says about 17 percent of those who have been killed by drones since the program effectively began in 2004 were "non-militants," and estimated that the "non-military fatality rate" has dropped to about 13 percent under Obama. [14.4% is the frequency of days in the year which are Sundays, and 16.7% is the frequency with which a fair six-sided die will roll a six, so it would be interesting to know what Brennan’s definition of "exceedingly rare" is - JFP.]

**DRONE SUMMIT**

Register today for Drone Summit: Killing and Spying by Remote Control.

April 24, 2012

Dear Dick,

We got some great news this morning.

Thanks to your pressure, the State Department relented and just granted a visa to Pakistani lawyer Shahzad Akbar who champions cases of drone victims. We are so delighted that he will now be attending our Drone Summit this Saturday!

This victory means we have to quickly raise $2,000 for Shahzad’s last-minute travel arrangements. Your donation will guarantee that the plight of innocent victims killed by secret CIA drones will finally be heard in our nation’s capital.

Shahzad’s presence is one more reason to register for the Drone Summit: Killing and Spying by Remote Control in Washington, DC April 28-29. Other great speakers include investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill who just returned from Yemen and Somalia, and ACLU privacy expert Jay Stanley who will speak about drone use by police and border patrols right here at home.

This week I began touring with my new book Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control. I find a growing awareness and deep concern about the proliferation of killer and spy drones. We hope our Summit, book and actions will help protect innocent lives and civil liberties.

For a more peaceful world, Medea Benjamin
Drone Summit: Killing and Spying by Remote Control - highlights

A final statement from the summit is here:

http://droneswatch.org/2012/04/29/drone-summit-statement/

Presentation by Chris Woods of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism: "Border control: US reporting of civilian drone strike casualties"


Jeremy Scahill's piece in the Nation on the Yemeni journalist imprisoned for reporting on U.S. strikes in Yemen (the journalist's lawyer attended the conference):

http://www.thenation.com/article/166757/why-president-obama-keeping-journalist-prison-yemen

“F Word: It’s not Just Koran-Burning, Also Drone Killings Riling People Up.”
Laura Flanders, Video Report, Grit TV, NationofChange, March 1, 2012: “‘There’s been real blowback from the burning of the Quran, but there has also been real blowback from the killings from continued drone strikes,’ says Ann Wright, a former State Department diplomat and retired Army colonel who stood trial this week for protesting US drone attacks. Wright’s riled up. So is Pakistan’s High Commissioner to Britain, Wajid Shamsul Hasan. Just last week, Hasan warned Britain to stop the American ‘Drone Wars’ that, he said, are slaughtering hundreds of its innocent civilians, or else the nuclear power ‘has the means’ to retaliate.” READ | DISCUSS | SHARE
http://www.nationofchange.org/f-word-it-s-not-just-koran-burning-also-drone-killings-riling-people-1330622649

ACLU SPEECH, PRIVACY, AND TECHNOLOGY PROJECT
1. About the **ACLU's Project on Speech, Privacy, and Technology**

   [https://www.aclu.org/speech-technology/about-aclus-project-spee](https://www.aclu.org/speech-technology/about-aclus-project-spee)Cached

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   Mar 29, 2011 – The **ACLU's Project on Speech, Privacy, and Technology** (SPT) is dedicated to protecting and expanding the First Amendment freedoms of...

2. **Staff Attorney-ACLUF Speech, Privacy and Technology Project**, NY...


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   Aug 2, 2011 – The **Speech, Privacy and Technology Project** of the ACLU's National office in New York City seeks applications for a full-time Staff Attorney.

3. **Even After Supreme Court GPS Decision, Feds Still Want**...


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   Mar 19, 2012 – Posted by Sarah Roberts, **Speech, Privacy and Technology Project** at 8: ... On Friday, the ACLU, along with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, ...

4. **Articles** ...

   [https://www.aclu.org/technology-and-liberty](https://www.aclu.org/technology-and-liberty)Cached

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   Bigger Monsters, Weaker Chains. The **ACLU's Project on Speech, Privacy, and Technology** monitors the interplay between cutting-edge **technology** and civil ...
planes, who are the victims and what are the legal and moral implications. But this book is also a call to action, with a look at what activists, lawyers and scientists are doing to rein in the drones, and ways to move forward.

“Activist extraordinaire Medea Benjamin has documented how the U.S. government’s use of drones to murder hundreds of innocent civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen has increased the danger to our national security. Benjamin’s Drone Warfare is the first book that reveals the vocal international citizen opposition that challenges the legality and morality of America’s extrajudicial execution drones before they kill here at home.” —Ann Wright, U.S. Army colonel (ret.) and former deputy chief of mission for U.S. embassies in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and elsewhere

Weeks after the 2002 American invasion of Afghanistan, Medea Benjamin visited that country. There, on the ground, talking with victims of the strikes, she learned the reality behind the “precision bombs” on which U.S. forces were becoming increasingly reliant. Now, with the use of drones escalating at a meteoric pace, Benjamin has written this book as a call to action: “It is meant to wake a sleeping public,” she writes, “lulled into thinking that drones are good, that targeted killings are making us safer.”

Pre-order here!

To bring author Medea Benjamin to your city or local book store for a book event please contact Alli at alli[at]codepink.org.

DEMOCRACY NOW INTERVIEWS BENJAMIN AND AKBAR, Friday, April 27, 2012  Whole Show

As Obama Expands Drone War, Activists & Victims’ Advocates Join D.C. Summit on Growing Civilian

Pakistani lawyer Shahzad Akbar, who represents families of civilians killed in U.S. drone strikes, was finally granted a visa to enter the U.S. this week after a long effort by the State Department to block his visit. He has just arrived in Washington, D.C., to attend the "Drone Summit: Killing and Spying by Remote Control," organized by human rights groups to call attention to the lethal rise in the number of drone strikes under the Obama administration. Obama argues U.S. drone strikes are focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists and have not caused a huge number of civilian casualties. "Either President Obama is lying to the nation, or he is too naive, to believe the reports which CIA is presenting to [him]," responds Akbar. The summit comes as the United States pursues a radical expansion of how it carries out drone strikes inside Yemen. The so-called "signature" strike policy went into effect earlier this month, allowing the U.S. to strike without knowing the identity of targets.

We’re also joined by Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK and an organizer of this weekend’s summit. "So many people who spoke out against George [W.] Bush’s extraordinary rendition and Guantánamo and indefinite detention have been very quiet when it comes to the Obama administration, who is not putting people in those same kind of conditions, instead is just taking them out and killing them," Benjamin says. "So we need to make people speak up and say that when Obama says this [program] is on a tight leash, this is not true, this is a lie." [includes rush transcript]

Filed under  Drone Attacks, Drones, Pakistan, Yemen, Human Rights, Obama, War on Terror

Guests:
Shahzad Akbar, co-founder of Foundation for Fundamental Rights, an organization representing victims of drone strikes in Pakistani courts.

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK, one of the organizers of this weekend’s Drone Summit. Her new book is called *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control*.

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  *Mar 28, 2012*

- With Death of Anwar al-Awlaki, Has U.S. Launched New Era of Killing U.S. Citizens Without Charge?

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- Obama Touts War’s End in Afghanistan, But Critics See Election-Year Guise for Prolonged Occupation

  *May 02, 2012*

- Attorney General Eric Holder Defends Legality of Targeted Killings of U.S. Citizens Overseas

  *Mar 06, 2012*

**Links**

- Drone Summit: Killing and Spying by Remote Control (Washington, DC, April 28-29, 2012)
- Follow Medea Benjamin on Twitter: @medeabenjamin
- Follow Shahzad Akbar on Twitter: @ShahzadAkbar
- Foundation for Fundamental Rights
- Akbar blog
- Reprieve
- CODEPINK

**Rush Transcript**

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Transcript

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: As the Obama administration paves the way for a radical expansion of how it carries out drone strikes inside Yemen, a major conference in Washington, D.C., this weekend will highlight the human costs of the CIA's clandestine drone attacks. The Drone Summit, jointly organized by a group of human rights and advocacy organizations, aims to educate the American people on the exponential and lethal rise in the number of drone strikes during Obama's presidency. The conference will also examine the rise in the use of drones for domestic surveillance.

Earlier this week, the Washington Post reported President Obama has granted a CIA request to launch drone attacks even if it does not know the identities of those who will be killed. The so-called "signature" strike policy went into effect earlier this month, and at least one attack has already been launched. It is widely expected the number of U.S. drone strikes will see a radical jump with the new policy in place. At least 48 civilians have been killed in 27 U.S. strikes inside Yemen since 2009. The sweeping leeway for the strikes has already been in effect in Pakistan, where U.S. drones have killed hundreds of civilians.

AMY GOODMAN: A Pakistani lawyer who represents victims of U.S. drone strikes was granted a visa to the U.S. earlier this week. Scheduled to address the Drone Summit this weekend, Shahzad Akbar had previously been forced to cancel a trip to the U.S. after he was denied a visa. Akbar, who will be joining us on the program, filed the first case in Pakistan on behalf of family members of civilian victims of drone strikes.

SHAHZAD AKBAR: I think people are scared. They're definitely scared. I've seen some people. I've seen—I've interviewed some neighbors whose next-door house was hit, and I could feel that what—they're feeling, because they're feeling this imminent threat. And they are actually feeling helpless at the same time because they have no other place to relocate, because they've—a lot of them have no skills, no education, so they cannot relocate in any other part of Pakistan.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Shahzad Akbar has just arrived in the United States. He's joining us from Washington, D.C. He co-founded the Foundation for Fundamental Rights, an organization representing victims of drone strikes in Pakistani courts.

And we're joined by Medea Benjamin, co-founder of CODEPINK, one of the organizers of the weekend’s Drone Summit. She has written a new book; it's called Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control.

We welcome you both to Democracy Now! Medea, let us begin with you. Talk about this drone conference and the significance of Shahzad Akbar finally making it to the United States, finally getting a visa.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: We're excited that we're bringing together so many different kinds of people for this conference to look at the proliferation of drones not only in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, but the expansion of drone bases to places like Kuwait and Oman and Ethiopia, Seychelles, Australia, Turkey. This is a campaign that's out of control in the hands of the CIA, the Joint Special Operations Command, both in secret, away from the eyes of the American public. We want to use this summit to shine a light on this drone program. And as you said, how it's coming home here to the United States, we already know over 700 permits have been granted to U.S. agencies. And that's going to expand exponentially in the coming years. So we want Americans to start paying attention to this and do something to regulate, monitor and rein in the use of drones.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And Medea, in your book, you—one of the countries you didn’t mention is the Israeli use of drones, which in your book you do say that in between 2006 and 2011, about 500 people
were killed in Gaza and the Occupied Territories by Israeli drones?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Yes, the U.S. is the number one producer of drones, but Israel is right behind, number two, and number two user of drones, as well. And there is a very close collaboration between the United States and Israel. In fact, the drones that we use overseas to kill people were first developed by an engineer working for the Israeli military. And then, right behind them in terms of producers, is China. And they’re all selling drones overseas. Over 50 countries already have them. So the proliferation is not just the United States and Israel, but we should be worried about the worldwide proliferation.

AMY GOODMAN: Shahzad Akbar, you have made it into the United States. Can you talk about first trying to get here, after you filed suit against the United States for drone attacks killing Pakistanis that you represent?

SHAHZAD AKBAR: Thank you, Amy. Thank you for having me here.

Actually, it took me 14 months to get visa to get to U.S., because the main purpose of visiting U.S. after I started a drone litigation in Pakistan, that I, on behalf of the victims in Pakistan, wanted to reach out to Americans so that they can make an informed judgment on drones. Their opinion matter, and it’s going to matter in next elections, as well. So they need to know what drones are doing to humans in Pakistan, many of them who are civilians. And it has been said by independent groups and journalists, as well, a bigger—higher number of civilian victims. And that has to be reported to the American public so they can make an informed judgment on drones, that if American government should let be killing people overseas in their names.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And Shahzad Akbar, most of these attacks in Pakistan are occurring in the tribal areas that are essentially cordoned off by the Pakistani government to the outside world. Could you talk about the particular conditions in these tribal areas?

SHAHZAD AKBAR: Yes, most of the drone strikes are taking place in North Waziristan Agency, which is the Federally Administered Tribal Area on the western border of Pakistan next to Afghanistan. And this area has not just been cordoned off by Pakistani military, but actually there’s a presence of over 40,000 troops in Waziristan, which is a very valid reason for Pakistani troops to reach and find any miscreants who are there, who U.S. is looking for, for terrorism.

But the drone strikes, why they are taking place so easily in that area is because this area is cordoned off by the military and no one from rest of the country can go in and find out what’s really going on. And it’s very difficult for information to get out of Waziristan. In Pakistan, we just refer North Waziristan as black hole of information. So, it takes us long time to figure out that one particular drone strike had killed how many civilians and how many militants. And that is the reason the CIA has been pushing to keep it in this way, so that the rest of the world cannot know who are the victims. And every time we have brought names and identities of victims from North Waziristan, the civilian victims, we haven’t been contradicted publicly by the CIA if that is right information or wrong, because what we have found from our investigation is that even those people who are being taken out, they have been taking out—they have been taking out these people as signature strikes, basing on their behavior or conduct. So, even CIA doesn’t know the identity of most of the people they’re killing in Waziristan.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk specifically about the people that you’ve represented? Last year, we talked about a news conference in Pakistan of young people who were protesting the fact that their family members—they called attention to the fact that their family members were killed in drone strikes. I think one of the young men, the teenagers, was named Tariq Aziz—yes, interestingly enough, like the former Iraqi official. And he was there at this news conference that was organized by Reprieve, the British human rights group, and then went back to his home and was killed in a drone strike, this
after his family had been killed in a drone strike, his 12-year-old cousin also killed.

**SHAHZAD AKBAR:** Yes, this particular attack was really sad, because Tariq Aziz was getting training from us and Reprieve in Islamabad to become a photojournalist. He was going to work on a program we call Transparency Cameras. And we were distributing cameras among the youth of Waziristan and giving them very basic training how to use that camera and then upload the pictures on internet and send it to rest of the world. And Tariq Aziz was one member of that group which was getting the training.

And it was 27th of October that we trained Tariq Aziz and many others like him in Islamabad on this conference where many international human rights activists, lawyers and journalists participated. He travels back to Waziristan on 28th of October, 2011, and on 30th of October he is killed in a drone strike while he was driving his mother to a clinic. Fortunately, he was able to drop his mother to the clinic, but his cousin, Waheed, who was younger than him, probably 13 or 14 years old, he was also killed in the strike.

It’s very interesting because U.S. has never denied that they have killed Tariq. They say that, "Yes, we have killed a youth, and he was a militant." And they do not say anything further. And we’ve been pushing the American government, and specifically the American ambassador in Pakistan, Cameron Munter, who is now signing off the attacks, that this particular individual, a youth from Waziristan, was not a militant, and we have ample proof that he wasn’t. First of all, we shouldn’t be proving that he’s not a militant, and you should be proving that he is militant. But this person had been killed, while, if you had anything against him, this person could have easily been arrested in Islamabad when he was at a conference one mile away from the American embassy for three days.

And there many other victims just like Tariq Aziz. There is another child victim we are representing, Sadaullah, who was—whose house was attacked in 2009. And this attack was immediately reported having killed an al-Qaeda target. And later on we found out that al-Qaeda target wasn’t killed and that that house was Sadaullah’s house, where his family members were killed. Four of his family members were killed. And Sadaullah, who was only 14 years old, he lost both of his legs and an eye. He was a school-going child, but now he doesn’t even go to school, because there is no one in his family who could take him to school. He cannot walk. And there are many—

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Well, Shahzad Akbar, precisely on this issue of who’s being hit, I wanted to turn to President Obama’s comments earlier this year where he defended the administration’s unprecedented use of armed drones during a so-called "virtual interview" that was conducted online. He also acknowledged the U.S. was carrying out drone strikes inside Pakistan. Obama made the comment after he was asked how he feels about the large number of civilians killed by drones since he took office.

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** I want to make sure that people understand, actually, drones have not caused a huge number of civilian casualties. For the most part, they have been very precise precision strikes against al-Qaeda and their affiliates. And we are very careful in terms of how it’s been applied. So, I think that there’s this perception somehow that we’re just sending in a whole bunch of strikes willy-nilly. This is a targeted, focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists who are trying to go in and harm Americans, hit American facilities, American bases, and so on. It is important for everybody to understand that this thing is kept on a very tight leash.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Shahzad Akbar, your response to the President’s assessment of these drone strikes?

**SHAHZAD AKBAR:** This is precisely what I will be talking about at the Drone Summit on this weekend, because we have record—we are starting from the first strike under President Obama, and that first strike victim is—there’s one surviving victim who’s still alive, and he’s another 17-years-old
child, a high school student, and having had lost seven of his family members, the first strike which President Obama took. And he has filed a case in Islamabad against the Americans for this strike. And there are many others after that.

But what I see here is that either President Obama is lying to the nation, or he is too naive, to believe on the reports which CIA is presenting to President, because CIA is the one who is taking out such strikes, and they are coming to President and say that "We are taking out the right targets." Now, this is something where they need to assert their reasoning and see, like, people you are killing, what do you have against them, and the identities? Because so far, nothing is known about the identities. And Tariq Aziz is a very latest example of how randomly people are being targeted. And there are—there is a big number of civilians.

I mean, there’s another attack of 17th March, 2011, which Pakistani government even retaliated on a higher scale. And that attack had killed 50 of the jurga members who were in arbitrary council trying to mediate on a conflict between two sub-tribes last year in North Waziristan. And all of them were taken out in a drone strike. Pakistani president and Pakistani parliament and prime minister, they all retaliated and condemned this attack. Now, if we took—if we were to believe President Obama, then it means that, on the ground, whatever we’re seeing is wrong, and we just have to believe that people who are remote-controllly killing these people in Pakistan, they even have the ample knowledge of their guilt, so that can they take out these targets.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Medea Benjamin, in your book you also go into some of the behind-the-scenes action that is occurring among the soldiers and the CIA operatives who are launching these strikes. Your—can you first clarify this issue of the signature strike, what is different about that from the other targeted strikes of the administration? And also, this entire issue of these attacks being made by people in—remotely, on civilians as well as supposed militants?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, there’s a—they divide them between what’s called the "personality" strikes, when you actually have a hit list and you know the names of the people you’re trying to take out, and the other is the "signature" strikes, where it’s just by suspicious behavior, if you look like—if you’re with a group and you’re carrying guns and you look like you’re militants.

And this is done by pilots that are thousands of miles away, don’t know the culture, don’t know the people, don’t know the region. And so, they are given this tremendous responsibility. And they kill by day, and then they’re supposed to go home to their families at night. They’re sitting in a place like Creech Air Force Base outside of Las Vegas and supposed to integrate themselves into their families and their communities after spending the day watching remote control and using a PlayStation to kill people. We find that these pilots have PTSD just like soldiers on the battlefield have, as well. And I think it’s putting them in a terrible situation.

I do want to say, Juan, that so many people who spoke out against George Bush’s extraordinary rendition and Guantánamo and indefinite detention have been very quiet when it comes to the Obama administration, who is not putting people in those same kind of conditions, instead is just taking them out and killing them. So we need to make people speak up and say that when Obama says this is on a tight leash, this is not true, this is a lie. And the American people have to become aware of it and not be partisan about that. We don’t care who’s doing the killing; we want the killing to stop.

AMY GOODMAN: What about, Medea Benjamin, the use of drones at home?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, yes, you know, people should be aware that the administration has already killed Americans overseas. And Eric Holder has said that Americans are not guaranteed judicial process, so there is nothing stopping them from killing Americans here at home, either. In fact, when the head of the FBI was asked at a hearing whether drones could be used to kill Americans at home, he
said he wasn’t sure about that.

But certainly drones are coming back for surveillance. They are being used now in an experimental way with police departments, but there is a very strong lobby of these drone manufacturers, who have 53 members of Congress who have formed their own drone caucus, and they are pressuring to get drones allowed in a much broader way into U.S. airspace. That will happen now by 2015. And every police department in this country wants its own drones. We will be—you have done so many great programs already, Amy, on the surveillance society. This will take it to another degree altogether if we have drones overhead, and drones can come right into your window and look inside your home. Get ready for another level of surveillance.

And not only that, they can be equipped. Right now they’re talking about less-than-lethal means. They can have stun guns. They can have hand grenades. They can have all kinds of things on these drones. And as I said, who knows whether they could be used to kill people in the United States, as well?

AMY GOODMAN: Well, we want to thank you both for being with us. Medea Benjamin, who is co-founder of CODEPINK, author of the book Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control. I also want to thank our guest who has just come in from Pakistan, Shahzad Akbar, co-founder of the Foundation for Fundamental Rights. First denied a visa, now he is in Washington to attend the drone conference, Medea Benjamin, taking place in Washington, D.C. Many people have been protesting the drone strikes, within Syracuse—outside of Syracuse at the Hancock Air Field Base, at Creech. In Minneapolis, they also will be there. And where will they be?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: So, they can come and join—people can still come to the conference on Saturday or watch it live-stream on the CODEPINK website.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to thank you both for being with us. This is Democracy Now!, democracynow.org, The War and Peace Report. We’ll be back in a minute.