

Report for the Drones and Forever War conference Saturday July 11th at Friends House, London

This has become an annual event in the Drone Campaign Network calendar and is an excellent opportunity to update information, gain some new perspectives, listen to and question good speakers, meet other campaigners and plan action.



Chris Woods and Chris Cole

Chris Woods - key note speech

Chris gave us a very informative and thought provoking talk based on his excellent recently published book 'Sudden Justice; America's Secret Drone Wars'.

He charted the rise in US armed drone use from the first test firing on Jan 23rd 2001, failed attempts to kill Bin Laden pre 9/11 and the first drone death in October 2001. Between 2001 and 2004 the inaccurate early Predator was controlled by the CIA. Bush was cautious in drone use, afraid of the legal issues around targeted killing and with no clear strategy. However when Obama came into power drone strikes escalated from one or two a year to one or two a day and the issue of legality was removed from US discourse.

Chris explained how public scrutiny of the CIA in Pakistan has changed its use of drones there and he is worried that journalists are no longer reporting on civilian deaths in Pakistan. He told us of how the CIA had killed 80 children in a drone strike on a school but never owned up or paid any compensation. (compare this to the outcry of the massacre of 132 school children by the Taliban in Peshawar, which saw the re-introduction of the death penalty in Pakistan).

In Iraq between 2003 and 2006, up to 30 civilian deaths per strike were 'allowable'

before senior politicians had to approve that operation, but because of pressure from President Karzai, in Afghanistan this was reduced to one per strike.

The lack of accountability and secrecy surrounding drones from the military mean that we currently have very little information about civilian casualties in Iraq and Syria. Considering they are being used in densely populated areas these numbers are likely to be very high. There is still no clear strategy about drone use. Targeted killing has gone from being unacceptable to acceptable with Britain complicit in this, and the lines of who is the enemy have blurred. Combatants no longer wear uniform on the ground and those firing from above are unseen. Who can ISIS hit back at but civilians from the countries conducting the air war as we have seen recently in Tunisia. Drones have helped change the nature of war and are making the world far less safe.

PANEL

Following questions to Chris Woods, there was a panel session with Maya Evans from Voices for Creative Non Violence UK, Tim Harman from Quaker Council for European Affairs and Chris Cole from Drone Wars UK.



Maya Evans - drones in Afghanistan

Maya travels regularly to Afghanistan, most recently in May, and is in constant contact with people there through the young Afghan Peace Volunteers. They have had 35 years of war and a third of the population live in poverty. There is poor health care and opium is a problem.

The people are still living under drones. Although the UK have withdrawn their armed Reaper drones the US are still flying drones and there is British complicity in strikes through RAF Croughton. Drone strikes have increased massively in the last 6 months. There are drone strikes in Kandahar every day. This week 120 civilians were killed by drones and a funeral party were bombed earlier in the month.

The Taliban are unpopular but many Afghans are adopting ISIS as preferable to foreign forces.

Chris Cole - Next Drones Now

Chris Cole looked into the future to see where drone technology and drone warfare will be taking us in a few years' time. Today's armed drones are relatively slow and cumbersome. They have no defensive capability and can only be flown, to use the military jargon, in 'permissive airspace,' where there is no real threat from other aircraft or anti-aircraft defences. Reaper and Predator are like the tiger moth or the bi-planes of the drone era and are fast becoming outmoded.

What the military want - and arms companies are rapidly developing for them - are drones that will travel much faster, be more stealthy and, most controversially, be much more autonomous. Drones like the X-47b, RQ-180, FCAS and Neuron are being designed to undertake and enable more military intervention to 'take out the bad guys' with as little as possible political, economic or human cost back home.

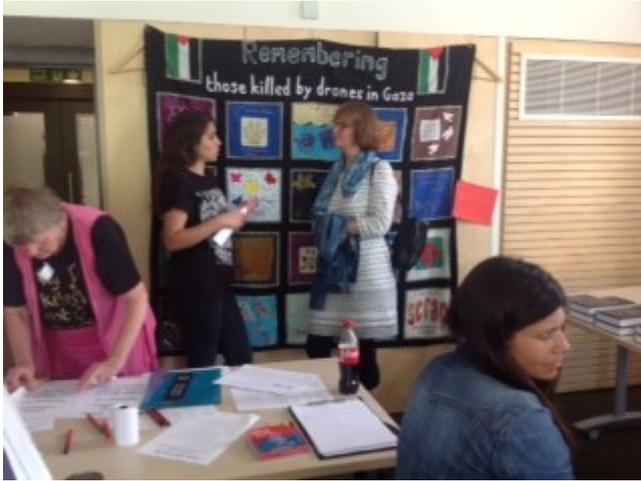
Tim Harman - Europe

Tim summarised his talk thus : In my work for the Quaker Council for European Affairs (Brussels), I have been examining the issue of armed drones from a European perspective. Armed drones is a European issue. According to a 2014 report by the RAND Corporation, ten European countries have armed-drone development programmes: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the UK.

There has also been complicity by some European governments in US drone strikes. The intelligence services of Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK have all been credibly accused of providing intelligence to the US — intelligence relevant to the targeting of US drone strikes. Also, Ramstein Air Base, a US military installation in Germany, is being used as a control base for US armed drones, with the tacit consent of the German government. European countries may also be criticised for failing to protest publicly about US drone strikes — by not protesting, they may be allowing the US to change customary international law in the US's favour.

The EU institutions in Brussels also have a role in armed-drone development. The European Commission is using EU taxpayers' money to fund drone research by arms companies. At an EU summit meeting in December 2013 it was agreed to make drone development an official policy priority for the EU — this means that even more funding is likely to be proposed next year (2016). In February 2014 the European Parliament passed a resolution criticising current EU policy on armed drones, although this resolution is non-binding.

You can contact me at tharman@qcea.org to find out more about my work



chatting in the break, with the Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign quilt in the background showing some of those killed by drones in Gaza

Ellis Brooks - launch of Fly Kites Not Drones Education Pack

Following lunch and a chance to network with others at the conference Ellis and Maya explained the education pack which has been developed by Quakers, Pax Christi, Drone Campaign Network, Voice for Creative Non Violence UK and the Afghan Peace Volunteers with financial support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The idea came from the successful 'Fly Kites Not Drones' day on March 21st 2014. We saw inspiring film of a primary school trial, although there is appropriate material for both primary and secondary schools. The pack is essentially a web based resource which allows easy access and flexibility of content so that more can be added and feedback from teachers can be shared. There will be hard copies available in September.

WORKSHOPS (feedback from workshop facilitators)

1.Drones and Forever War - building the campaign

This workshop looked at how individuals and groups could campaign around the fact that drones are lowering the threshold for military intervention by making it much easier for politicians to undertake such intervention.

We looked at various campaign messages and what would work with which different audiences from the public, to campaigners, to politicians and policy makers. In particular we thought the message that war is being rehabilitated and re-branded through drone warfare would be helpful although a lot more work needed doing in this area.

2.How Drones affect us and the people we talk to

Drone 'jigsaw' reading , using Grégoire Chamayou's book *Drone Theory*

In this book Chamayou tests the modern use of armed drones against various philosophical theories. The most interesting is the last section in which he looks at

what armed drones mean to us as a society, politically and ethically.

For the first activity of the workshop participants shared their experiences of conversations they had with others, friends and family or with various other groups, about drones. My own experience is people nod and their eyes glaze over, so I was hoping that this book, discussed in a group, could make us some ideas for a different conversation about drones. One of the members of our group, Tim Harman from QCEP, often had to speak to large groups and give talks.

In the groups, to start with we looked at some of the illustrations that Chamayou has chosen to illustrate his book, of Marilyn Monroe, the Panopticon, the Gorgon's head, and a cartoon robot to get us into the mood.

Having set the scene with the images, we read together the chapter, 'Essence of Combatants', each group member reading a small chunk and feeding back to the others.

The particular points that came out was Hegel's theory of instrumentalism, 'I become my weapon', and Kant's Doctrine of Right, which is quoted as saying the state cannot ask us to become 'assassins or poisoners'. In our group the point that came out was the 'moral injury' what the use of drones does to the individual and to us as a society. This is what we are doing to ourselves.

3. Campaigning on Israel, drones and the UK

In our workshop we started by hearing a short history of Israel's use of drones and central role in developing drone technology. We then talked as a group about the Stop Arming Campaign and brainstormed ideas for creative ways to get the message across around the Stop the Arms Fair events in September.

4.DCN Week of Action and Fly Kites Not Drones

These two workshops were run together. We started with some exercises from the education pack and then discussed ideas for the week of action 3rd - 10th October including big stencils, drone sounds, holding talks, flying kites. Tim will likely help organise a vigil at Shenstone Elbit factory and on October 3rd there will be a demonstration at RAF Waddington called Scones Not Drones. We discussed ideas for this including involving Veterans for Peace and musicians. We hope to encourage lots of young people to come along, helped by young Quakers in Sheffield.

PLENARY

Following feedback from the workshops, Chris Cole and Penny Walker thanked everyone for taking part and encouraged groups to organise events for Drones Week of Action.

We are very grateful for Quaker support in providing venue and refreshments.