US military “Drone War” objectors speak out

Excerpts from Ed Pilkington & Ewen MacAskill, the Guardian. November 18, 2015

Four former US Air Force service members, with more than 20 years of experience between them operating military drones, have written an open letter to Barack Obama warning that the program of targeted killings by unmanned aircraft has become a major driving force for Isis and other terrorist groups.

The group of servicemen have issued an impassioned plea to the Obama administration, calling for a rethink of a military tactic that they say has “fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like Isis, while also serving as a fundamental recruitment tool similar to Guantánamo Bay”.

In particular, they argue, the killing of innocent civilians in drone airstrikes has acted as one of the most “devastating driving forces for terrorism and destabilization around the world”.

The letter, addressed to Obama, defense secretary Ashton Carter and CIA chief John Brennan, links the signatories’ anxieties directly to last Friday’s terror attacks in Paris. They imply that the abuse of the drone program is causally connected to the outrages.

“We cannot sit silently by and witness tragedies like the attacks in Paris, knowing the devastating effects the drone program has overseas and at home,” they wrote.

The joint statement—from the group that has experience of operating drones over Afghanistan, Iraq and other conflict zones—represents a public outcry from what is understood to be the largest collection of drone whistleblowers in the history of the program. Three of the letter writers were sensor operators who controlled the powerful visual equipment on US Predator drones that guide Hellfire missiles to their targets.

The four are represented legally by Jesselyn Radack, director of national security and human rights at the nonprofit ExposeFacts. “This is the first

Human rights award for AWOL war resister in Germany

By Courage to Resist. December 1, 2015

André Shepherd was a US Army helicopter mechanic in the Iraq War. During leave in Germany back in 2008, he went AWOL and formally requested asylum. His legal case is now being argued before the highest courts of the European Union.

On September 12, André received the 2015 Human Rights Award, presented by PRO ASYL in Frankfurt.

“With his application for asylum, André Shepherd assumes in this case the burden of establishing a legal precedence... Almost eight years after his decision to seek asylum, André Shepherd continues to argue his case in court, knowing that his example is also that of the many servicemen resisting illegal wars. His efforts have made him a paragon of resolution and humanity. The foundation PRO ASYL gratefully presents him the 2015 PRO ASYL-Hand Award.”

André continues to receive support from Connection e.V., a Germany-based organization supporting war objectors.
On September 14, 2015, the "Air Force Times," a weekly newspaper with a circulation of over 65,000 subscribers, published the advertisement below. Courage to Resist is proud to have contributed to this effort.

Drone War objectors speak out cont.

time we've had so many people speaking out together about the drone program," she said, pointing out that the men were fully aware that they faced possible prosecution for speaking out.

Their open letter to President Obama, Secretary Carter and Director Brennan

We are former Air Force service members. We joined the Air Force to protect American lives and to protect our Constitution. We came to the realization that the innocent civilians we were killing only fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like ISIS, while also serving as a fundamental recruitment tool similar to Guantanamo Bay. This administration and its predecessors have built a drone program that is one of the most devastating driving forces for terrorism and destabilization around the world.

When the guilt of our roles in facilitating this systematic loss of innocent life became too much, all of us succumbed to PTSD. We were cut loose by the same government we gave so much to sent out in the world without adequate medical care, reliable public health services, or necessary benefits. Some of us are now homeless. Others of us barely make it.

We witnessed gross waste, mismanagement, abuses of power, and our country's leaders lying publicly about the effectiveness of the drone program. We cannot sit silently by and witness tragedies like the attacks in Paris, knowing the devastating effects the drone program has overseas and at home. Such silence would violate the very oaths we took to support and defend the Constitution.

We request that you consider our perspective, though perhaps that request is in vain given the unprecedented prosecution of truth tellers who came before us like Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, and Edward Snowden. For the sake of this country, we hope it is otherwise.

On November 21, attorney Jesselyn Radack noted on her Twitter feed, “My drone operators went public this week and now their credit cards and bank accounts are frozen” (the spelling of her post has been conventionalized here). Note that none of these men currently face any legal charges. Ms. Radack is working with the objectors to overcome this harassment. She is also working to launch a new project, the Whistleblower & Source Protection Program (WHISPeR).
Chelsea Manning found guilty of absurd prison infractions, spared solitary confinement after 100,000 petitions delivered

By the Chelsea Manning Support Network. August 19, 2015

After 100k petitions were delivered to the Army, a secret disciplinary panel at Fort Leavenworth military prison sentenced Chelsea to 21 days of restrictions on her recreational activities, including no access to the gym, library or outdoors.

We won an important victory, as Chelsea was facing “indefinite solitary confinement;” however, this ruling of guilty on all four absurd charges is not without significant ramifications.

“Now these convictions will follow me through to any parole and clemency hearings, forever. I was expecting to be in minimum custody in February, but now years added,” Chelsea explained (via phone) after the hearing.

“As Chelsea’s lawyer, I am horrified and angry about these convictions. This was a star chamber where Chelsea had to defend herself in secret. These convictions will not silence her. She will only be stronger and we will fight that much harder in her appeal to overturn her convictions and her sentence,” declared Chelsea’s lead attorney Nancy Hollander.

Chelsea had formally petitioned for the hearing to be open to the public, or at the very least, her lawyers. DENIED.

A few days ago, Chelsea began visiting the prison library to prepare her own defense. Prison staff DENIED her access.

Chelsea made a formal demand to be tried by court martial instead of the secret panel. DENIED.

GUilty of expired toothpaste. “A tube of anti-cavity toothpaste, MKIC, was found in your possession past its expiration date of 9 April 2015,” read the charge sheet. Note that this tube was recently sold to Chelsea by the prison.

GUilty of unauthorized reading material, specifically: this month’s Caitlyn Jenner issue of Vanity Fair, the memoir “I Am Malala” by Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, the US Senate Report on Torture, the LGBT publication Out Magazine, and the Cosmopolitan issue featuring Chelsea’s interview. Note that these materials were delivered to Chelsea by the prison mail system.

GUilty of disrespecting a guard, for simply asking to speak to her attorney before making a statement about what happened moments earlier in the mess hall.

And what started all this? Chelsea may have accidently knocked a small condiment packet (possibly mustard) off of her table during a meal. She’s not actually sure. Regardless, GUILTY of disorderly conduct.

Isis shouldn’t dictate how we address refugees cont.

will. However, stoking the fears about a shadowy wave of terrorists coming from everywhere that there is warfare and strife is a disturbing, alienating and disproportionate response.

The people of France were the ones who delivered the Statue of Liberty to the US nearly a century and a half ago. Beside the statue for many years was a massive immigration station on Ellis Island. Describing the site of the statue as it was erected, the American poet Emma Lazarus wrote that the statue silently demands:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

It is a poem that defines America—and we and the EU would do well to remember it, especially in such turbulent times.

Action Man:
Battlefield Casualties

A fantastic new three minute video produced by Veterans for Peace UK. This is a great resource for any counter military recruiting presentation. View and download it at: battlefieldcasualties.co.uk
Some want to exploit the Paris attacks in order to justify seizures of power to meet their own political ends. We should not let that happen.

By Chelsea E Manning, the Guardian op-ed. November 25, 2015

Following the horrific attacks by Isis terrorists in Paris and Beirut, we have rapidly seen blatant pandering to xenophobia on a disturbing scale and scope. Leaders throughout the US and Europe have demanded that authorities stifle the flow of migrants seeking asylum, and to increase the size and depths of intelligence and law enforcement powers in the US and Europe.

I don’t have all the answers – but I do know that blaming minority groups, refugees and immigrants, investing in gigantic surveillance platforms and calling for expansive legal authority and the creation of a neo-Gestapo and panopticon-style police state aren’t one of them.

Even in the weeks and months before the attacks, rightwing parties in Europe–most notably the National Front in France–have attempted to exploit a rising xenophobic sentiment following this year’s influx of migrants seeking refuge from Syria, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East. Immediately following the attacks such fears have “gone viral” in a way that is disturbing and frightening.

In Canada, the plans to exclude unaccompanied male refugees from resettlement make me fear—in addition to the broader problems of severing young people from their existing support systems—for those queer and transgender folk who are fleeing from being hunted down and murdered indiscriminately.

In the US, federal lawmakers and dozens of state governors have called for the US to stem the flow of those seeking asylum from Syria, culminating in the quick passage of legislation in the US House making the approval of Syrian refugees into the US administratively difficult, if not impossible—even though approvals of such refugees numbered less than 1,700 in 2014.

The CIA director, James Brennan, described the ongoing controversy over the intelligence communities’ mass surveillance and bulk record collection of US citizens and non-citizens as “a lot of hand-wringing over the government’s role in the effort to try to uncover these terrorists”.

However, what the intelligence community and law enforcement authorities in the United States and Europe failed to acknowledge is the fact that even before and following the attacks in Paris and Beirut, none of their agencies had lost any of the capabilities that they had previously or that the reformed USA Freedom Act had not even taken effect.

The demands for more power by the powerful were described by Naomi’s Klein “Shock Doctrine” principle: people and organizations often exploit crises in order to justify seizures of power to meet their own political and economic ends. The inevitable xenophobic and pro-surveillance responses of the US, EU and Canadian governments were likely, as other analysts have pointed out, part of the strategy calculated by the very organization (Isis) that perpetrated the ghastly atrocities.

The leaders of Isis are canny strategists with a solid understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the west. They expect politicians and military leaders in the US and Europe—particularly in the case of France and the United Kingdom—to overreact in response to successful attacks in the US and Europe and territorial gains in Iraq and Syria, and they use those responses to recruit Europeans and Americans in their call to arms.

Like many other attacks, the attacks in Paris were tragic, horrific and coldly calculated. They may or may not have been preventable—it’s simply far too soon to know, assuming that we ever continued on inside page