

Drones: judge, jury and executioner

Tony Magliano | Nov. 11, 2013 Making a Difference

The following should disturb us.

On a sunny afternoon in October 2012, 68-year-old Mamana Bibi, while gathering vegetables in the family fields in northwest Pakistan, was blown into pieces by at least two Hellfire missiles fired from a U.S. drone aircraft.

Bibi's granddaughter, 8-year-old Nabeela, ventured to where her grandmother had been picking vegetables earlier in the day. "I saw her shoes. We found her mutilated body a short time afterwards. It had been thrown quite a long distance away by the blast and it was in pieces. We collected as many different parts from the field and wrapped them in a cloth."

This horrific event, taken from the worried words of Nabeela, is highlighted in a new report from Amnesty International, "[Will I be next? US drone strikes in Pakistan](#) [1]."

Drones -- pilotless aircraft used by the CIA for surveillance and targeted killings -- have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of totally innocent people like Mamana Bibi.

The report states that according to various nongovernmental organizations and Pakistan government sources, the U.S. launched more than 330 drone attacks in Pakistan between 2004 and September 2013, killing between 400 and 900 civilians and seriously injuring more than 600 people.

According to the report, 18 laborers -- at least one boy among them -- were killed from a series of drone strikes in the remote Pakistani village of Zowi Sidgi. Missiles first struck a tent in which some men had gathered for an evening meal after a hard day's work, then struck those who came to help.

Witnesses described a horrific scene of body parts, blood, panic and terror as U.S. drones continued to hover overhead.

"Secrecy surrounding the drones program gives the US administration a license to kill beyond the reach of the courts or basic standards of international law. It's time for the USA to come clean about the drones program and hold those responsible for these violations to account," said Mustafa Qadri, Amnesty International's Pakistan Researcher.

In another report, "[Between a Drone and Al-Qaeda: The Civilian Cost of US Targeted Killings in Yemen](#) [2]" -- released at the same Oct. 22 news conference as Amnesty International's report -- Human Rights Watch examines six U.S. targeted killings in Yemen.

According to the report, two attacks killed civilians indiscriminately in clear violation of the laws of war while the other attacks may have caused disproportionate civilian deaths.

"Yemenis told us that these strikes make them fear the US as much as they fear Al-Qaeda in the Arabian

Peninsula," said Letta Tayler, senior terrorism and counterterrorism researcher at Human Rights Watch and the author of the report.

The Catholic just war theory's principles of proportionality and discrimination -- arguably never able to be met within the context of modern warfare -- are clearly not being met here.

The killing of innocent civilians and the resulting fear from targeted drone attacks are considered by many acts of U.S. terrorism, inspiring vows of vengeance and perpetuating endless conflict and terrorism from all sides.

Please email and call your congressperson and two U.S. senators (Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121) and urge them to launch a congressional investigation into targeted drone killings and to introduce legislation that would ban all drone attacks and provide a mechanism for families of innocent victims to acquire fair compensation.

The Gospel way of acting justly and living nonviolent unconditional love is the only weapon that can defeat terrorism and ultimately triumph over evil.

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about Catholic social teaching. His keynote address, "Advancing the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century," has been well received by diocesan gatherings from Salt Lake City to Baltimore. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net [3].]

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[1] <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA33/013/2013/en/041c08cb-fb54-47b3-b3fe-a72c9169e487/asa330132013en.pdf>

[2] <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/10/22/between-drone-and-al-qaeda>

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