

End the Drone Wars

We come to RAF Waddington today to say a clear 'no' to the growing normalisation and acceptability of drone warfare.

War we are told is no longer the hell it once was. Thanks to the marketing of drone war as 'risk free', 'precise' and above all 'humanitarian', war has been rehabilitated and accepted as virtually normal by those who see little or nothing of the impact on the ground thousands of miles away. Remote wars mean most no longer hear, see or smell the impact of bombs and missiles. With just a little effort we can almost believe that war is not happening at all.

But behind the rebranding, war is as brutal and deadly as it has always been with civilians killed, communities destroyed, and the next generation traumatized.

Over the past few months UK forces and drones have withdrawn from Afghanistan after 13 years of war. Tens of thousands have been killed and seriously injured (including 453 British soldiers killed and more than 600 seriously wounded). Far from bringing peace and security as politicians are wont to pretend, the war in Afghanistan has been an utter failure. According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 2014 saw the highest number of civilians killed and injured there. The agency reported in December 2014 that "children civilian casualties increased 33 per cent compared to 2013, with casualties among women up 12 per cent. Current projections indicate that 2014 will be the first year that the civilian casualty count will pass 10,000 civilian casualties since UNAMA began its reports."

But even as we continue to commemorate the centenary of the 'war to end all wars' lessons are not learnt. UK forces are now back in Iraq where our Reaper drones join other aircraft in daily airstrikes against ISIS. The horrific violence perpetrated by ISIS – conceived and born in the last Iraq war – is now met by yet more Western bombs in order to teach terrorists that violence and bombing will not be tolerated. And so it goes on. In Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Yemen, Mali, Gaza. On and on across the globe the circle of death and violence perpetuates, sustains and inflames yet more violence.

And we ask what kind of peace can be built by that named Reaper, Predator and Avenger? And we look at Afghanistan and Iraq and know the answer – we reap what we sow. The peace and security wrought by war and violence is no peace at all. And so we have come to RAF Waddington, the home of drone warfare here in the UK to say clearly and simply 'End the Drone War'. To say that the age-old imperial notion that violence works – that violence can save us – is so threadbare it has worn away. That emperor has no clothes.

Let us instead build real peace and real security by joining with those working around the globe to build peace *by peace*. Rather than deploying Reapers, Predators and Avengers we must together deploy Reconciliation, Justice and Love. Let us reject violence, war and drones to enable real peace and real security to flourish.

5 January 2015

Chris Cole, Oxford
Katharina Karcher, Coventry
Gary Eagling, Nottingham
Penny Walker, Leicester