

Col. Peter Gersten, Commander, 432d Wing and 432d Air Expeditionary Wing
Creech Air Force Base
Indian Springs, NV

14 November 2009

Re: Reaper and Predator Unmanned Aircraft Systems

Dear Col. Gersten:

As you probably know, demonstrators periodically come to Indian Springs because the Air Force's Predator and Reaper systems are headquartered there. Nevada Desert Experience (NDE) has spent most of its 27 year history focused on the abolition of nuclear weapons, and we still are working for disarmament—not merely arms control, or even non-proliferation, which could leave existing nuclear arsenals essentially intact. Seeing an urgent need to rein in the sudden prevalence of robotics systems in the military, and of the increasingly destructive use of remotely piloted hunter-killer air systems like the MQ-1 and MQ-9, NDE has expanded its mission beyond the confines of the Nevada Test Site. We seek dialog with you and others in your command and will continue our longstanding and well-documented tradition of nonviolent resistance to nuclear weapons and war.

An excerpt from a statement we published in March in advance of an earlier set of vigils at Creech underscores broad concerns about these weapons:

The idea that technology can provide a cleaner and safer battlefield is seductive but has been proven a lie. From the catapult and crossbow, through the use of poison gas and airplanes in World War I, the atom bomb, helicopters and napalm in Vietnam to the “smart bombs” of the Gulf War, war has only grown deadlier. Technological advances may reduce the danger of casualties among the military personnel in the short run, but with each advance the number of civilian deaths multiplies and every war of the past century has numbered more children than soldiers among its victims.

The Predator and Reaper assassinations and bombings—with their high rate of civilian “collateral damage”—naturally generate enormous resentment in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region, a region hosting nuclear weapons facilities. We believe that that resentment – in both the short and long run—will outweigh any tactical advantage derived from assassinating presumed Taliban or Al Qaeda militants. Indeed, it's a resentment that spikes recruitment and may spawn decades of retaliation.

Like you, we do not wish US military pilots to face needless risk. But their protection lies not in using mindless, amoral new technologies to do their deadly work. Their safety lies in ending the US war on this region. Also, the extreme profits made by some people and companies and the un-recused conflicts of interest call into serious question the patriotic justifications for the ongoing wars.

Neither do we want Clark County to face needless risk – the risk of retaliation and targeting. We do not want Las Vegas to become part of the global battlefield. We do not want Indian Springs tainted with complicity in murder – indeed in some cases, mass murder. Thanks to the Reaper assassination campaign hundreds of civilians have been killed. How is such killing to be distinguished from the terrorism the US claims to be fighting? After all, doesn't our own State Department define “terrorism” as the killing of civilians for political purposes? If your crews are controlling these attacks aren't you legitimate targets, and the rest of us potential collateral damage?

We believe that problems between nations and other political entities must be solved peaceably. Respectfully enlisting the support of other powers interested in regional stability, our peace-seeking must be marked by due process, negotiation diplomacy and cooperation. Violence only spawns more violence. Furthermore, the source of the on-going violence cannot be ascribed to outside parties or other countries. History existed before 9-11, and U.S. involvement in the region hasn't been as supportive of democracy, altruistic or even merely defensive as befits this great nation.

Col. Gersten, we ask you to reflect on your own role—and that of those both above and below you in the chain of command—in facilitating Reaper and Predator “Hellfire.”

We ask that you examine your conscience. We ask that you not—drone-like—obey orders regardless of the havoc they wreak. Further, we ask you not to play an avenging God with the innocent lives of others. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said in opposing the Vietnam war:

“Don't let anybody make you think that G-d chose America to be His divine, messianic force to be a sort of policeman of the whole world...It seems that I can hear G-d saying to America, "You're too arrogant, and if you don't change your ways, I will rise up and break the backbone of your power and place it in the hands of a nation that doesn't even know My Name.”

We ask that you do something remarkably courageous: that you do your utmost to influence your “superiors” to remove the Reaper from our midst, from the US arsenal entirely, and to stop using the remotely controlled hunters to kill more of our fellow human beings which make the prospects for any peace even more remote than Nevada is from Afghanistan.

Respectfully,

Jim Haber
Coordinator, Nevada Desert Experience
702.646.4814
jim@NevadaDesertExperience.org

Peter Ediger
Las Vegas Manager, PACE e Bene Nonviolence Service
702.648.2281
peter@PaceeBene.org