

Predator Drones To “Stop Genocide”?

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Afrobeat Radio producer Ann Garrison spoke to journalist, human rights investigator, and electrical engineer Keith Harmon Snow about the lobbying campaign to use General Atomics' Predator Drones “to stop genocide” in Africa.

Transcript:

Predator Drone firing a Hellfire missile. Ann Garrison: General Atomics' Predator Drones were designed to be unmanned surveillance aircraft, but, beginning in 2000, Bill Clinton and then George Bush, had the Predators outfitted to drop Hellfire missiles, as they have in at least five countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, and now Libya.

In 2008, General Atomics began producing the much larger Reaper Drones, which carry up to 2 tons worth of bombs, 10 times more than the Predators, cruise at higher altitudes and three times the speed, and, have more surveillance capability thanks to advances in computers.

In December 2010, the military tech section of San Francisco's techno lifestyle magazine, WIRED, reported that the U.S. Air Force was phasing out the Predators in favor of the Reapers, and accepting the last of its order of 268 Predators in the early months of this year, 2011.

Then, on February 10, 2011, WIRED published “PENTAGON: Drones Can Stop the Next Darfur,” an editorial advocating the use of Predator Drones to stop genocide, like that in Darfur and Rwanda.

The editorial was then echoed or republished by a list of organizations including Invisible Children, Operation Broken Silence, Run for Congo Women, and the ENOUGH Project at the Center for American Progress. Here to talk about this today is Keith Harmon Snow, independent journalist, human rights investigator, war correspondent, and, electrical engineer, with many years experience reporting on Africa.

Ann Garrison: Keith, welcome, and, do you think Predator Drones can stop genocide in Africa?

Keith Harmon Snow: Thanks, Ann. This “Predator Drones to stop genocide” narrative is a psychological operation. First, there's the false narrative about genocide — who is committing it, and who isn't. And second there's the false narrative about the United States, Israel, and its allies being the “peacekeeping” policeman who, out of our moral necessity, we cannot allow “genocide” or quote “war crimes” on “our watch.” Well, in Rwanda, Uganda, Congo and Sudan, the U.S. and its allies are the occupiers. We're involved Keith Harmon Snow in covert wars, we're responsible for creating genocide, war crimes, and

crimes against humanity in these places. These drones will contribute to war crimes committed with the backing of ordinary American citizens. Of course, they will be used, for example, to protect oil installations, to protect AFRICOM bases, to protect Coca Cola and Ben & Jerry's gum arabic plantations in Darfur, and they'll be used to support covert military operations that are happening everywhere.

Ann Garrison: Afrobeat listeners, and anyone who's read the last 17 years of UN reports on mass atrocities in Rwanda and Congo—and I know that may not be that many people, but anyone who has read these reports—has an idea of what's wrong with the Rwandan government's official account of the 1994 Rwanda Genocide, which is being put forth as an excuse for U.S. use of drones over Africa. Could you talk about the prevailing story of genocide in Darfur, which is the other excuse put forth in the WIRED editorial?

Keith Harmon Snow: So, Ann, what you're talking about is this "political economy of genocide" — where the term "genocide" is used as a tool for conquest. The false "genocide in Rwanda" narrative has been used to punish the victims and exonerate the killers, and the killers are in power today, and they're widely celebrated as quote "survivors of genocide." In South Sudan and Darfur, the US/UK/Canada/NATO and Israel and other allies have been involved in genocide and war crimes — and we use the standard definitions of these terms — and this is since at least 1990. We backed the invasion of Rwanda from 1990 to 1994, and we won. And we backed the Sudan People's Liberation Army's covert war in South Sudan, and we won. And we back the "rebels" in Darfur today, and this remains highly contested and up for grabs. What we really want in Sudan, in Darfur, is regime change in Khartoum, and to control the resources in Darfur, and that would be oil, uranium, copper, and the gum arabic plantations, to mention a few.

Ann Garrison: We both know that drones are already engaged in surveillance, above the African continent, and that they've dropped bombs in Yemen and now in Libya. What more do you think they're likely to do because of this latest lobbying, or, one might say, General Atomics' marketing campaign launched in WIRED Magazine?

Keith Harmon Snow: Well, remember that what we're seeing in WIRED is this cusp of this development and there's 20 years of research and development that we haven't seen anything about, that's more sophisticated, so what they're trying to do is reconfigure and use up the old drones, and we have no idea what some of these technologies are capable of. But they're being deployed in the sizes of little drones the size of hummingbirds, and gigantic drones that carry these huge military payloads. They're being deployed under the sea in Unmanned Undersea Vehicles. And in outer space, in Unmanned Aerospace Vehicles. And the whole technology is C4ISTR — and that is military jargon for Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance. And they're being used in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Niger — off California, and on the Mexican border today. So the "drones to stop genocide" campaign is the latest advance of this western corporate fascism.

Who makes these things? Our mothers and fathers, the people we know who work at universities and research outfits, corporations employing millions of Americans. And the killing of innocent people in other places is happening out of sight and out of mind. And we can all say, "my hands and my conscience are clean." And we can all say, "I did my part to prevent genocide." Never Again, and all that nonsense, you know.

Ann Garrison: Yeah. . .OK. . . WIRED Magazine is essentially a PR agency for venture capitalists packaged as a hip, trendy techno lifestyle publication. The campaign to repurpose the Predator Drones to, quote, “stop genocide” appeared as the U.S. Air Force was phasing them out and making the Reaper Drones its lead combat aircraft. So, from out here, the home of WIRED Magazine, this looks like venture capital defining military strategy even though WIRED presented it as the Pentagon’s latest, greatest idea—it’s humanitarian idea. General Atomics, which manufactures both the Predator and the Reaper, was the leading funder of Congressional trips from 2000 to 2005, according to the San Diego Tribune, and most of those trips were organized to promote the Predators. So, is military industrial profit the leading motive behind this Predator Drones to stop genocide campaign?

Keith Harmon Snow: Well, Ann, most people who talk about genocide in mainstream culture have no idea what they’re talking about, because most of the discourse is coming out of places like WIRED and the Wall Street Journal and the New Yorker Magazine and even the Nation Magazine — and we’re talking about, like you say, private profit in parallel with “full spectrum military dominance,” meaning Empire.

Hollywood plays a huge role in this, working with the Pentagon, including George Clooney and Angelina Jolie and Ben Affleck, and going back to the Star Wars films, where Luke Skywalker indoctrinated the public mind with all of these technologies that we’re seeing operating today and that was in the 1980s.

The “drones to stop genocide” idea comes out of the liberal extremist establishment, the Center for American Progress and ENOUGH and STAND, Invisible Children, and Raise Hope for Congo and Save Darfur — and these all depend on the new “social networking media” like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Buzz, the Omidyar network, to advance mass murder under the guise of humanitarianism and philanthropy. Of course, behind all of these are non-profit organizations, and think tanks and foundations. So just follow the money and it leads straight to genocide and war crimes supported by ordinary Americans.

Ann Garrison: Keith Harmon Snow, thanks for speaking to AfrobeatRadio. The U.S. Air Force now uses more drones than any other combat aircraft and has more drone pilots than cockpit pilots in training, so I’m sure we’ll be speaking to you about this again.

Keith Harmon Snow: Thanks so much, Ann. Take care.

Ann Garrison: You too. For Pacifica, and AfrobeatRadio, I’m Ann Garrison.

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