

Minute on Drone Warfare
Midlothian Friends Meeting
December 11, 2016

Midlothian Friends Meeting is deeply concerned about the proliferation of lethal unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly known as drones. We are especially troubled that the United States is leading the way for drone warfare and the dehumanizing attacks of targets on kill lists around the globe. We believe that war is never a justifiable means of solving conflicts, and it only perpetuates fear, suffering, and revenge.

Some see drones as an improved method of waging war. With new drone technology, “pilots” in U.S. bases use remote control to kill people who are thousands of miles away. Drones have become the preferred weapons to conduct war because they are seen as minimizing the risk to U.S. troops. However, drone pilots are experiencing mental health problems and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) similar to ground troops.

Aerial drones are just the beginning of a dangerous new arms race. The Pentagon is spending billions of dollars to build an array of autonomous and semi autonomous weapons to form configurable battlefield networks. These networks, based on artificial intelligence, will be capable of independently hunting for targets and executing kill and destroy orders on command. Furthermore, technology capable of independent kill and destroy decisions is thought to be only ten years out. Russia, China, Israel, and the UK are also actively developing these technologies. We must stand against these insidious, dehumanizing weapons with the same vigor that we stand against weapons of mass destruction.

We are also creating hostility in communities attacked by drones. Evidence suggests that the trauma of living under drone attacks causes anti-American resentment and aids in the recruitment of violent extremists. According to a former State Department official, for every drone strike, the U.S. generates roughly forty to sixty new enemies. Drone strikes have led to the death of hundreds of innocent civilians. In addition, the U.S. is using drone warfare in countries where we are not at war, such as Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and the Philippines.

If drones lower the threshold for war, what happens when everyone has drones? Drone technology is spreading. Friends Committee on National Legislation reports that more than 50 countries are developing drones and more than 70 have acquired various types. Experts suggest that every country will possess the ability to create or acquire armed drones within 10 years. Many mistakenly see the use of drones as a low cost – human and financial – alternative to war. However, the drones program allows the U.S., and potentially other countries, to remain in a constant state of endless war.

We call on our country's leaders to stop the international spread of drones and promote a just and peaceful world community. Our country's decision to use drones will ultimately define the type of nation and world we leave to our children. We urge our government to put an end to this secretive, remote-controlled killing and instead promote foreign policies that are consistent with the values of a democratic and humane society.

Midlothian Friends Meeting recognizes the value of every life. We are guided by the inspirational teachings of Jesus and other spiritual leaders promoting peace. We also stand by our Quaker witness against war and violence which began over 350 years ago. The Quaker Peace Testimony states: *"We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world."*