The conviction of ex-Nazi Boere and Washington's war crimes

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On March 23, a German court sentenced former Nazi death squad member Heinrich Boere to life imprisonment for war crimes carried out more than 65 years ago.

Boere, 88, was charged with the cold-blooded killing of three Dutch civilians suspected of supporting resistance to Nazi occupation in 1944. The murders were carried out as part of a repressive campaign waged by his unit, known as the "Germanic SS of the Netherlands."

Boere had lived in Germany openly since escaping from the Netherlands at the end of the war. A Dutch court tried him in absentia in 1949, condemning him to death. While the sentence was later commuted to life in prison, the German government refused to extradite him. In the early 1980s, a German commission investigating Nazi war crimes dropped his case, concluding that the killings were "acceptable acts of war," justifiable under international law as a response to violent acts of resistance against the German occupiers.

This was the position held by Boere himself, who made no attempt to deny the killings. He invoked the so-called Nuremberg defense: He was following orders. In 2007, he told the German magazine *Der Speigel*: "They told us they were partisans, terrorists. We thought we were doing the right thing."

Much of the press coverage of Boere's prosecution and conviction has stressed that this will be one of Germany's last war crimes trials, given that the surviving perpetrators of the atrocities of Hitler's Third Reich are rapidly dying off.

The New York *Daily News* editorialized on the subject: "There aren't many Nazi slugs left to feel such justice, but every last one must—and soon." The newspaper added that "culpability for monstrous crimes is never erased. It is the job of those who believe in justice to make evildoers pay."

While Boere richly deserves his sentence, with neither the passage of time nor his advanced age justifying clemency, one does not have to reach back nearly seven decades to uncover such crimes, or focus solely on octogenarians in meting out justice.

The same newspaper, last month, published an editorial entitled "One for the good guys: Sharpshooting drones pick off Pakistan Taliban chief."

Commenting on the January 14 remote-controlled assassination of Hakimullah Mehsud, a leader of the Taliban in Pakistan, the editorial stated that Mehsud was an "extra-appealing target because he claimed responsibility for sending the suicide bomber who infiltrated a CIA base in Afghanistan in December and killed five of the agency's officers and two civilian contractors." It concluded by urging its readers to "give a cheer to the skilled US forces who guide the drones from thousands of miles away."

During the Second World War, those who resisted Nazi occupation by assassinating German officials and collaborators—in the Netherlands and other countries—were known as partisans. Their exploits were lionized in the media as well as in a host of films.

The German occupiers routinely described these same resistance fighters as terrorists, thereby justifying their extra-judicial execution.

Washington has employed the same modus operandi in its wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Any Afghan or Iraqi who resists the US occupation of their country is branded a "terrorist," whose killing is justified.

The same kind of crimes Heinrich Boere was convicted of carrying out in the Netherlands 65 years ago are being committed by the US military and the

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CIA on a daily basis. Heavily armed Special Forces units are tasked with assassinating those suspected of involvement in the Afghan resistance. They carried out the same murderous work in Iraq. In many instances, the victims are unarmed men, women and children.

In one such operation on December 27, US Special Forces raided a house in Kunar Province, dragged eight Afghan students, ages 11 through 17, from their beds, handcuffed them and shot them through the head. A farmer and a young peasant boy were also killed in the attack. Military officials justified the killings on the suspicion that the house was being used to manufacture roadside bombs.

In a similar raid last month in Ghazni province, a 61-year-old shopkeeper, his wife and son were gunned down by US troops because the family had provided shelter to Taliban fighters the night before. Boere and his cohorts in the SS would have been very familiar with such operations.

Then there are the drone missile attacks against suspected enemies of the US occupation on the other side of the border in Pakistan.

"Since 2009, as many as 666 terrorism suspects, including at least 20 senior figures, have been killed by missiles fired from unmanned aircraft flying over Pakistan," the *Washington Post* reported March 21. Here, the word "terrorism suspects" is used—in a fashion indistinguishable from the Nazis—to describe fighters resisting the foreign occupation of Afghanistan.

The *Post* report cites figures compiled by the New America Foundation, a corporate-backed think tank, which concluded that 32 percent—one in three—of those killed by the drone attacks have been unarmed civilian men, women and children. Pakistani government officials have reported that the overwhelming majority of those killed are civilians.

In handing down the sentence in Germany, the judge referred to Heinrich Boere's gunning down of suspected supporters of the Dutch resistance to Nazi occupation as "practically incomparable maliciousness and cowardice—beyond the decency of any soldier."

What can one say of those who kill defenseless men, women and children—and those suspected of resisting US occupation—by pushing a button while sitting in front of a video screen 7,000 miles away? One can only imagine what Adolf Hitler could have done with such technology.

The main theme of the *Washington Post* is the role of CIA Director Leon Panetta in directing these assassinations and mass killings. It focuses on one particular drone attack that killed Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud last August. CIA officers told Panetta that Mehsud, whose movements were being tracked by a drone camera, was not alone, but with his wife. He ordered them to "take the shot" that killed them both.

What is described is a policy of cold-blooded murder in which so-called "collateral damage"—the slaying of innocent civilians—is not some accident, but a calculated, deliberate act.

In an earlier period, when the CIA gained its epithet "Murder Inc.," there was an effort made in Washington to keep such bloodthirsty acts secret. Now, US officials—including Obama—openly boast of "taking out" their enemies, provoking little or no controversy in the political establishment and the media.

Such a debased political and moral atmosphere is an unmistakable manifestation of a deep-going crisis of US imperialism, which America's ruling elite is attempting to resolve by means of war abroad and a wholesale assault on the working class at home.

The reality is that Obama, Panetta and Gates, just like Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld & Co. before them, are guilty of war crimes. The individual atrocities, assassinations, acts of torture and collective punishment are the inevitable byproducts of waging wars of aggression, the principal offense for which the surviving Nazi leaders were tried at Nuremberg.

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