

By Brian Terrell From [Voices For Creative Nonviolence](#) | Original Article



Current events concerning Turkey and the Kurds in Syria remind me of a conversation I had with a US Air Force colonel almost 17 years ago in a courtroom in Des Moines. To refresh my memory, I dug deep into my closet and dusted off the transcript of the case, “STATE OF IOWA, plaintiff vs. CHRISTINE GAUNT et al.,” in which I was a defendant, heard in February, 2003, the month before the US invasion of Iraq. The following quotes from that dialogue are verbatim per the transcript.

The case concerned an alleged trespass at the headquarters of the 132nd Tactical Fighter Wing of the Iowa Air National Guard, based at Des Moines International civilian airport, on October 26, 2002. Activists from around Iowa blocked the gates of the base in protest of the 132nd's participation in Operation Northern Watch, the no-fly zone over northern Iraq imposed by the US after the Gulf War that lasted until the Iraq War in 2003. Pilots and crews of the Guard's F-16 fleet went to Turkey to participate in patrolling northern Iraq or to Kuwait to patrol in Operation Southern Watch for a month during most of the years those no-fly zones were in place.

One of the witnesses called by the state was Colonel Douglas Pierce, Vice Commander of the Iowa Air National Guard. Until a few weeks before our protest, Col. Pierce was commander of the 132nd and had personally led several deployments of the Iowa Air Guard to Operation Northern Watch.

Under direct questioning by the prosecutor, Col. Pierce described how the 132nd was under federal control as part of the US Air Force while posted overseas and how the no-fly zones were

authorized and conducted under a United Nations resolution. The resolution that Col. Pierce cited did not exist. Secretary General of the UN, Boutros Boutros-Ghali insisted that the no-fly zones were “illegal”, but US government and the Air Force often used this fiction to justify their almost daily incursions into Iraqi airspace that often resulted in civilian casualties.

Another fiction that Col. Pierce swore to under oath is the purpose of the no-fly zone. Defending myself, I had the opportunity to cross examine the Colonel, “Do you have any knowledge of what the purpose of that no-fly zone—the northern watch is?” Predictably, Colonel Pierce testified according to the official narrative: “Primary Purpose is, obviously, to reinforce the no-fly zone in northern Iraq and primarily to keep Saddam Hussein from attacking the Kurds who live in northern Iraq in which he had done on numerous occasions prior to the establishment of those no-fly zones.”

The base of operations for the US Air Force patrols over Iraq was Incirlik Air Base, the colonel affirmed. “So this Incirlik Air Base is – whose air base is it?” I asked. “Is it the United States air base?” “No. It belongs to Turkey,” he answered. “There are Turkish forces there too?” “Yes sir.”

“Have US Air Force enforcement of no-fly zones ever been interrupted so that the Turkish Air Force can go into Iraq and bomb Kurdish cities there?” I asked. “I don’t have personal knowledge of that,” Col. Pierce replied, followed by an eloquent and perfect example of Orwellian doublespeak: “All I can tell you is that our activities in northern Iraq have been restricted when supposedly events like that took place. And the reason our activities were restricted is that they didn’t want to have any black eye, if you will, on the United States or UN forces that they could accuse us of doing that if that’s what they did.”

What the colonel told the court in is that he did not know about the Turkish Air Force bombing Kurds in the very zone he swore that the US Air Force was there to protect, but he testified that when, not if but when, “supposedly events like that took place,” US Air Force activities in the zone were restricted. And the reason for that restriction was “they (the US and UN) didn’t want to have any black eye” for anything that the Turkish forces did to the Kurds.

“So if I got this right,” I asked just to be sure, “the watch is primarily to protect the Kurds. However, the watch is lowered when Turkey wishes to attack the Kurds, is that correct?” Col. Pierce had no answer, but taking a cue from the Nuremberg trials he demurred: “You are asking me to make foreign policy decisions, and that’s well above my pay grade.” Rather than allow proceedings to edge any nearer to the truth, the prosecutor intervened, “Objection, Your Honor”

and the judge complied, “Okay, I’ll sustain that objection.”

The “green light” that the US regularly gave Turkish armed forces to attack Kurdish communities in northern Iraq during the years of Operation Northern Watch has recently allowed Turkish forces into northern Syria to attack Kurds there previously under US protection. As President Trump understands the situation at present, using the language of ethnic cleansing, “they (Turkey) had to have it cleaned out.” Trump, in his cynical callousness toward the Kurds, stands in illustrious company. It was not Saddam Hussein who first used chemical weapons against the Kurds of northern Iraq (with assistance and approval of the US). That distinction belongs to Winston Churchill, who as Britain’s Secretary for War and Air in 1920 answered his critics: “I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against primitive tribes.”

Incirlik Air Base is again in the news. On Wednesday, October 16, President Trump publicly affirmed the open secret that the US, in a NATO nuclear sharing agreement, has up to 50 B61 nuclear bombs stored in bunkers at Incirlik. In these tense times, Trump was asked, are those nuclear warheads safe? Whereas Douglas Pierce, Vice Commander of the Iowa Air National Guard testifying in court in 2003, had to stick to the official narrative that Incirlik “belongs to Turkey,” Trump is under no such restraints and was able to boast about Incirlik as our own: “We’re confident, and we have a great — a great air base there, a very powerful air base. That air base alone can take anyplace. It’s a large, powerful air base.”

The number of overseas US military bases, estimated at more than 800 in some 70 countries, is hard to gauge, given that they often are camouflaged as bases of the host country. The constitution of Honduras, for one example, does not permit a foreign military presence and officially, no US troops are based there. Under a “hand shake” agreement with the US, however, Palmerola Air Base today unofficially houses some 600 US troops, down from a peak of thousands in the 1980s. In violation of Irish neutrality, the civilian airport at Shannon is a virtual US air base, with more than 3 million US soldiers and their weapons having passed through since 2001. Menwith Hill, in Yorkshire, United Kingdom, officially a Royal Air Force Base, is the nerve center of the US National Security Agency’s full spectrum surveillance and targeted assassination programs with only a token RAF presence. The US has the same nuclear sharing arrangement under which US nuclear warheads are maintained in Turkey with five other NATO member nations. No nation hosts a US military base without surrendering its sovereignty and its integrity to some extent.

Trump’s confidence is well placed. Along with Incirlik, the US has many “great” and “very powerful” military bases around the world. In 2003, Col. Pierce’s courtroom testimony revealed

the purpose behind this great game of smoke and mirrors: it is to keep the US from getting a “black eye,” so that no one “could accuse us of doing that if that’s what they did.”

Trump says that “We’re getting out of the endless wars” but that is a lie. While exposing the Kurds to Turkish aggression, roughly 1,000 U.S. troops remain in Syria and there are 5,000 troops across the border in Iraq. Now Trump is sending 1,800 more US troops to Saudi Arabia.

Trump is already claiming his place in history now for a cease fire that Turkey says isn’t one. “And you know what? Civilization is very happy. It’s a great thing for civilization,” he boasts. “There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people,” said the historian Howard Zinn, and there is no lie that can cover the black eye of US complicity in genocide.