

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 2, 2010 at 11:28am

Secret wars and the Gospel of nonviolence

by Art Laffin

Viewpoint

On June 4 a front page story in *The Washington Post* appeared titled: "U.S. 'Secret War' Expands Globally." The article reported that special operations forces are now deployed in 75 countries in a secret war against al-Qaeda and other radical groups. Plans exist for preemptive and retaliatory strikes to either avert or respond to a specific attack. Unacknowledged CIA drone attacks in Pakistan, along with unilateral raids in Somalia and joint operations in Yemen, are all an integral part of this secret war. The proposed administration budget for special operations is \$6.3 billion for fiscal year 2011, plus an additional \$3.5 billion in 2010 contingency funding.

On June 15 *The Post* also reported that there is nearly \$1 trillion in untapped mineral resources in Afghanistan, according to U.S. geologists. The Pentagon put the \$908 billion price tag on Afghanistan's reserves of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals such as lithium. "Obama's war just became more important and more complicated at the same time," said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer who helped advise the administration last year on its Afghanistan strategy.

On July 25 over 91,000 secret records of U.S. military actions in Afghanistan were published by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks after being leaked to several newspapers, including *The New York Times*. The documents include revelations about how U.S. and coalition forces have killed hundreds of civilians in unreported incidents, how a secret special forces unit hunts down targets for assassination or detention without trial, how Taliban attacks have increased, how Pakistan is providing intelligence to aid the insurgency and how covert operations against Taliban figures are being conducted.

On July 26 WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange stated that the release of the documents "one of the largest unauthorized disclosures in military history" was just the beginning and said some 15,000 files on

Afghanistan are still being vetted by his organization.

Finally, from July 19-21, *The Post* ran a three-part series titled: "Top Secret America." The series reported that there are now more than 1,200 government organizations and more than 1,900 private companies working on counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in some 10,000 locations across the U.S. Some 854,000 people have top-secret security clearance.

And so the U.S. pursues its quest for global military domination by waging its secret and overt wars with impunity, developing vast top-secret intelligence networks, continuing its brutal occupation of Iraq, and relentlessly prosecutes a war in Afghanistan, now with the added incentive of cashing in on that country's vast mineral wealth.

Despite Congress and President Obama authorizing \$59 billion on July 29 for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ? while the poor get poorer, more social services are cut, and our environment becomes more endangered; despite the mounting death toll of Afghan civilians and U.S. soldiers; despite the increase of suicides by U.S. soldiers (32 of them in the army during June) largely due to war-related stress and trauma; there is virtually no protest from most religious and political leaders.

As followers of Jesus what should our faith response be?

Jesus calls us to love one another. Jesus calls us to love our enemies. Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. Jesus calls us to put away the sword. Jesus calls us to forgive seventy times seven and to be merciful as God is merciful. In short, we cannot threaten, demonize, torture or kill another member of the body of Christ.

Thus, if we are to be faithful followers of Jesus, we must reject, without exception, all forms of violence, whether it is U.S. bombing and occupation, or al-Qaeda and Taliban sponsored violence. We must unequivocally renounce the "secret wars" being waged by the Pentagon. We must repudiate the ever-expanding intelligence network that comprises "top-secret" America and call for complete transparency. We must demand an immediate end to U.S. war-making and the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. We must renounce all U.S. drone attacks. And, finally, we must repent for our violent actions and make reparations to all of our victims.

If the cycle of violence and war that is causing so much suffering and death in our society and world is to end, we, as individuals and as a society, need to undergo a revolution of values and embrace the Gospel of nonviolence and compassion.

In his April 4, 1967 speech titled "Beyond Vietnam" Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of this urgent need. Let us heed his words:

A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: This way of settling differences is not just. This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of people normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. ...We still have a choice today, nonviolent co-existence or violent co-annihilation. ...We must find new ways to speak for peace. ... If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.

[Art Laffin is a member of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington, D.C.]

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