

Kathy Kelly: Afghan screams aren't heard

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Kathy Kelly reports after a Skype conversation with a young Afghan Peace Volunteer named Hakim

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Last weekend, in Kabul, Afghan Peace Volunteer friends huddled in the back room of their simple home. With a digital camera, glimpses and sounds of their experiences were captured, as warfare erupted three blocks away.

Two Afghan youth taking refuge together with the Afghan Peace Volunteers

The fighting has subdued, but the video gives us a glimpse into chronic anxieties among civilians throughout Afghanistan. Later, we learned more: Ghulam awakens suddenly, well after midnight, and begins to pace through a room of sleeping people, screaming. Ali suddenly tears up, after an evening meal, and leaves the room to sit outside. Staring at the sky and the moon, he finds solace. Yet another puzzles over what brings people to the point of loaning themselves to possibly kill or be killed, over issues so easily manipulated by politicians.

I asked our friend, Hakim, who mentors the Afghan Peace Volunteers, if ordinary Afghans are aware that the U.S. has an estimated 400 or more Forward Operating Bases across Afghanistan and that it is planning to construct what will become the world's largest U.S. Embassy, in Kabul. Hakim thinks young people across Kabul are well aware of this. "Do they know," I asked, "that the U.S. Air Force has hired 60,000 - 70,000 analysts to study information collected through drone surveillance? The film footage amounts to the equivalent of 58,000 full length feature films. The Rand Corporation says that 100,000 analysts are needed to understand "patterns of life" in Afghanistan."

Hakim's response was quick and cutting: "Ghulam would ask the analysts a question they can't answer with their drone surveillance, a question that has much to do with their business, "terror": "You mean, you don't understand why I screamed?"

Two days ago, "Democracy Now" interviewed Hakim about on-going U.S. military occupation in Afghanistan. http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/19/photos_of_soldiers_posing_with_afghan

"If we don't address the agreements that the U.S. and Australian governments and other governments are making for a long-term war strategy in Afghanistan," Hakim observed, "we are heading for an increase in violence in this part of the world, in South Asia, perhaps perpetual war, more serious than the Kabul attacks."

Analysts could better understand patterns of life in Afghanistan by mixing with Afghans in their homes and along their streets, unarmed.

The analysts would spend less tax-payer money but possibly obtain a genuine perspective on everyday life in Afghanistan. If they interacted with Afghan people instead of surveying them from the air, they'd be better equipped to study "terrorism," their supposed intent.

What if U.S. analysts could feel the frustration Afghans feel as convoys of trucks bearing fuel and food for U.S.

soldiers drive past squalid refugee camps where children have starved and frozen to death (250 die of starvation every day; 40 have frozen to death since January, 2012).

Hakim again: ?They would understand quickly, even through cursory study by one ?non-analyst,? that Afghans are just as infuriated by U.S. soldiers urinating on corpses as U.S citizens are by their own police pepper-spraying college students.

They would understand that just as U.S. citizens can?t even imagine living under the barrel of the Mexican army, Afghan citizens, including of course those labelled ?insurgents?, dislike foreign guns. No number of Special Ops forces staying on perpetually beyond 2014 can make Afghans like foreign guns. This is what the U.S. Afghan Strategic Partnership War Agreement will do with at least 4 billion U.S. tax payer dollars a year spent just on Afghan security forces.?

Ali, 16, understands that the agreement being readied for the NATO summit won?t accomplish foreign troop withdrawal. This creates what for some is deadly distrust. Ali knows that a long-term foreign military means that the firing and killing will continue. ?It?s tit-for-tat,? says Hakim, ?U.S. soldier-for-Talib, dollars-for-rupees, and all those insensible human decisions that occasionally make Ali cry. But, the military and militant apparatus does not have human ears. It has bombs. So, when the recent Kabul attacks were going on, as seen in the very human moments in the video clip, the Afghan youth crouching in the refuge of a room were assured and delighted to hear from Voices activists, from across the miles, calling to ask how they were.

?Ah! Someone cares. Someone listens.?

The monthly Global Days of Listening conversations which the youth have had with ordinary U.S., European, Middle Eastern and Australian citizens have helped change their lives person-to-person, overcoming the cold impersonal ?shoosh? of overhead rockets and under-running bloodshed.

Every day, Ghulam studies, cooks, washes the dishes and lives, very normally. But some nights, in the stupor of nightmares, Ghulam shouts subconsciously, out of ear-range to the million-dollar intelligence spies, ?What kind of world is this that still insists on signing war agreements???

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