

War is not 'change we can believe in'

John Dear | Feb. 10, 2009 On the Road to Peace

On the Road to Peace by John Dear S.J.

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

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Vol. 3, No. 22

President Obama's plans to send tens of thousands of more U.S. soldiers to Afghanistan are a recipe for brewing a disaster. It will bring about the death of more children, yet do nothing to thwart terrorist attacks against us. One cannot fight terrorism by war because war itself is terrorism. The British, Soviets, and the Bush administration have unleashed violence already on the broken, desolate land -- and all have failed. Obama's soldiers will fare no better.

This is not "change we can believe in." The plan smacks of musty, failed policy -- warmaking as an instinctive recourse, empire as usual. What we need is "nonviolent change we can believe in." I propose the immediate removal of our troops and a massive inflow of aid to abolish poverty, illiteracy and disease. In Afghanistan and Iraq. War will fail to cut the roots of terrorism. Active peacemaking is the only solution.

You might expect such thoughts from me. But one can come to the same conclusions by other routes, even by the route of politics. Former senator George McGovern addressed Obama in a recent editorial in *The Washington Post*.

Please do not try to put Afghanistan aright with the U.S. military. To send our troops out of Iraq and into Afghanistan would be a near-perfect example of going from the frying pan into the fire?. Military power is no solution to terrorism. The hatred of U.S. policies in the Middle East--our occupation of Iraq, our backing for repressive regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, our support of Israel--that drives the terrorist impulse against us would better be resolved by ending our military presence throughout the arc of conflict. This means a prudent, carefully directed withdrawal of our troops from Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and elsewhere. We also need to close down the imposing U.S. military bases in this section of the globe, which do so little to expand our security and so much to stoke local resentment.

McGovern proposes instead that the U.S. work with the U.N. World Food program and other agencies to provide a nutritious lunch every day for every school-age child in Afghanistan and other poor countries. This would be a minimum, as far as I'm concerned. We should also make restitution for every nation where we have ever killed a single child.

Rabbi Michael Lerner writes that we need an entirely new economic structure at home, one that would lead to a new global Marshall plan for the elimination of global poverty.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu argues that the U.S. should build thousands of schools in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. I would add hospitals, clinics, homes, and everything else that we've destroyed. "We will never win a war against terror as long as the conditions for poverty and injustice remain," he says. "Poverty breeds terrorism. So we should stop spending billions on weapons of destruction and instead feed the hungry people of the world. Then we'll stop terrorism."

It's the very theme taken up in the best-selling story of Greg Mortenson, *Three Cups of Tea*. An injured mountain climber, nursed to health by Pakistani locals, he departed for home having made them a promise out of gratitude -- to raise the money to build the villagers a school. One school went up, then another -- all told, 50 schools were raised in the desolate regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mortenson has done more to end terrorism than the billions bled from U.S. coffers to deploy troops and launch bombers.


Mortenson shows us a good blueprint for peace in Afghanistan. The most developed blueprint comes from "Sept. 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows" (www.peacefultomorrows.org [2]). They've composed a "primer for activists," which outlines a few unpopular truths.

1. U.S. and NATO occupation creates civilian casualties, angering Afghans.
2. Military occupation has hampered humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts.
3. Afghan women continue to face violence and oppression under the occupation.
4. U.S. policy has empowered warlords, drug lords and the Taliban.
5. The occupation contributes to violence and destabilization for ordinary Afghans, including refugees.
6. NATO allies and military leaders are questioning the occupation.
7. U.S. troop casualties in Afghanistan are on the rise.
8. Afghans are calling for a negotiated end to the war.
9. Military escalation will only increase the violence, and potentially lead to a wider war involving nuclear-armed Pakistan.
10. Military occupation of Afghanistan does not curb terrorism.

They propose eight recommendations for change:

1. Set a swift timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO military forces, to be substituted by U.N. forces for short-term security.
2. Immediately cease air strikes on targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
3. Support negotiations between all parties involved in the conflict, including Afghan women leaders.
4. Reform humanitarian aid and reconstruction funding efforts to prioritize Afghan organizations over foreign contractors. Ensure that funded projects address the needs and requests of Afghans and are not simply pet projects of foreign donors.
5. Invest in long-term aid that increases self-reliance such as sustainable agriculture efforts.
6. Immediately discontinue the use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which are costly, inefficient, and have militarized the aid process.
7. Standardize, increase, and publicly document compensation to Afghan families and communities affected by U.S. military actions.
8. Sign the treaty to ban cluster bombs, pay for cluster bomb and landmine cleanup in Afghanistan, and pledge never to use these weapons again.

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The Ob Privacy by  SafeSubscribe [3] to hear this message and the world's cry for peace. One hears it from every quarter, from the new book, *Afghan Dreams: Young Voices of Afghanistan*, (Bloomsbury) to plans for a massive "Global March for Peace and Nonviolence," involving over a million people in 90 countries on six continents (see: www.worldmarchusa.net [5]).

From every quarter, the message is clear: War is obsolete. War doesn't work. The days of war are over. We want nonviolent solutions for nonviolent breakthroughs to a new world of nonviolence.

"We've tried and tested every form of violence," Lech Walesa has said, "and not once in the entire course of human history has anything good or lasting come from it."

And from the Dalai Lama: "If we look at history, we find that in time, humanity's love of peace, justice and freedom always triumphs over cruelty and oppression. This is why I am such a fervent believer in nonviolence. Violence begets violence. Violence means only one thing: suffering. This small planet should be completely demilitarized."

As a Catholic, I add: war is not the way to follow Jesus. Indeed, Jesus says that whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me. In our wars, not only do we make Christ poor, hungry, homeless, sick and imprisoned, we kill him all over again.

So I urge us to resist the U.S. government's plans for more war. Make phone calls, write letters, lobby, speak out, organize, march, pray, fast and protest for the end of U.S. war on Afghanistan -- all of this toward a wider view: for a new culture of nonviolence.

John Dear has two new books, *A Persistent Peace* (his autobiography, from Loyola Press), and *Put Down Your Sword*, (Eerdmans) a collection of essays on nonviolence and peacemakers such as Cesar Chavez, Joan Baez, Dr. King, Sophie Scholl, Thomas Merton, and Franziska and Franz Jagerstatter. Both books are available from [Amazon.com](#) [8]. On April 24-26, he will lead a weekend retreat on the lives and lessons of Gandhi, King, Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton at the Kirkridge retreat center in Stroudsburg, PA; see: [www.kirkridge.org](#). For info, see: [www.johndear.com](#) [9].

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