

# VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

1249 W Argyle Street Chicago, Illinois 60640

Email: [info@vcnv.org](mailto:info@vcnv.org) Phone: 773-878-3815 Website: [www.vcnv.org](http://www.vcnv.org)

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Dear Friends,

Over the past few months, Voices members have been privileged to live and travel with Mohamed, a student from Sudan, who has joined our Voices team in Chicago. Mohamed lived and worked with us in Washington, D.C., for three weeks, as we launched the Peaceable Assembly Campaign. In mid-March, he and Kathy Kelly traveled to Omaha and then California, meeting with a variety of audiences. Student audiences were keenly attentive as Mohamed explained possible reasons for U.S. military warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

First, he told audiences about China's growing dominance over natural resources in various parts of Africa, including Sudan. Eight to ten percent of China's oil comes from Sudan, and China has chosen to use Chinese laborers—poorly paid people, many of whom are conscripts—to extract oil and other precious resources from various areas of Sudan.

Next, he explained that the U.S. is in an intense competition with China over control of resources and also over control of weapons placed in outer space. Neither China nor the U.S. wants to declare a cold war with each other while both countries are also so mutually interdependent. However, the U.S. public is urged to protect itself against terrorism by building bases and securing roadways in areas of Central Asia that are vital for control over pricing and flow of resources that the Chinese government also wants to control.

We should explore the possibility that U.S. military occupation and warfare in Afghanistan and now in Pakistan has more to do with affecting U.S. competition with China, an emerging superpower, than with battling an estimated eight-dozen Al-Qaeda operatives who might be lodged in Afghanistan.

We're also mindful of repeated atrocities against Afghan civilians committed by U.S. military, paramilitary groups and NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In autumn of 2009, Germany's defense minister misled the German public regarding an attack which killed 142 civilians in

northern Afghanistan. The German public sustained a vigorous protest, which resulted in resignations of Germany's defense minister and two top generals. In the past year, the U.S. public has been largely silent in spite of regular reports regarding U.S. atrocities that have killed and wounded hundreds of Afghan civilians. Please join in local efforts to break the silence and to demand an end to U.S. funding for ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq.

We look forward to working with you through Peaceable Assembly Campaigns, outreach and education events, and formation of small delegations to visit areas affected by U.S. militarism.

In Solidarity,

Kathy Kelly, Gerald Paoli, Mohamed Abdel-Magid, Jerica Arents, Joshua Brollier, Dan Pearson, Jeff Leys



## Kick Up the Volume: This Is No Time for More "Quiet Diplomacy" with Israel

By Joshua Brollier

*"You are either for or against apartheid and not by rhetoric... You are either on the side of the oppressed or on the side of the oppressor. You can't be neutral." - Desmond Tutu*

Few now dispute the manner in which the Reagan administration's policy of "constructive engagement" and "quiet diplomacy" enabled continued crimes by the apartheid regime in South Africa. The Reagan administration resisted change in South Africa and even collaborated with racist elements in Pretoria. After the decline of the Soviet Union, the popular liberation movement and massive surge in anti-apartheid protests within South Africa were no longer easily labeled as "clients of Moscow" or "terrorists." International outcry and political activism within the United States were so strong that the Congress finally

passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, initially introduced in 1972. Ronald Reagan vetoed the bill, but then the veto was over-riden by Congress, as there was bi-partisan support with many conservatives then beginning to speak out against apartheid.

Through years of constructive engagement, Reagan's pro-consul for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, refused to meet with black leaders in the liberation struggle. Indigenous Africans' experiences and opinions were disregarded while the State Department decided to base its strategy in a belief that the brutal, colonial white-minority government would gradually lead a peaceful transition to inclusive democracy.

This strategy was not only based on a fantasy, it was an insult to black Africans facing repression and had real implications in terms of human lives. During Reagan's presidency, at least 3,000 people would die, mostly at the hands of the South African police and military. Another 20,000, including 6,000 children, according to one estimate by a human rights group, would be arrested under "state of emergency" decrees.

As Reagan was speaking of strategic interests, about minerals and how South Africa was such a "friendly nation," people were suffering on the ground. It was no easy task to build the anti-apartheid movement from within the United States either. Palle Jordan, a member of the ANC, wrote:

"The majority of South Africans see the people of the USA, who came to their support, as their friend. But he/she would be a very foolish South African who imagines that such support was a spontaneous response based on principles shared by democrats the world over. We sweated blood to mobilize support among the US population! Literally scores of African-American students were expelled from Universities and Colleges for agitating for their institutions to dis-invest from South Africa!"

The United States has faced and is facing a similar diplomatic question with the nation of Israel. The international community is well aware that Israel consistently abuses human rights. Discriminatory policies against Arabs and Palestinians are strikingly reminiscent of apartheid in South Africa and fit the definition according to international human rights law. Israeli maintenance of a brutal military occupation of the Palestinian territories is nearing a half-century in duration. The Gaza strip has been under Israeli siege and blockade since 2007. Israel's recent major military offensive, which occurred as President Obama was being sworn into office, was a 22-day

attack on the civilian population and infrastructure in Gaza and caused over 1400 Palestinian casualties. The "security fence," or "apartheid/separation wall," continues to be built inside Palestine to annex further Palestinian land and resources. Additionally, in his recent trip to Washington, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was unrepentant about the new Israeli settlements being built in the Palestinian territories of East Jerusalem the West Bank.

With all of these indictments facing the Israeli government, what position has the Obama administration taken towards Israel? Media outlets have described the administration's policy as one of "tough love." Both President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have made statements condemning Israeli settlement expansion, but they have also asserted that the United States' commitment to Israel is "rock-solid, unwavering, enduring and forever." Beyond words, the United States has just signed a \$250 million arms deal with Israel on top of the annual \$3 billion that the U.S. already gives to Israel in military aid. Given these factors, it seems that Obama's policy of "tough love" towards Israel is even weaker than Reagan's policy of "quiet diplomacy" towards apartheid South Africa. And just as Pretoria was never interested in complying with constructive engagement's recommendations, Israel obviously does not seem too deterred by the Obama administration's occasional slogans. They likely understand the largely theatrical role of the U.S. presidency.

Looking back at the sacrifices of those in the anti-apartheid struggle, its time that people in the United States step up the level of risk we are willing to take to non-violently challenge this unabashed military support for Israel. We should also draw courage from our friends in Palestine and Israel who are facing much harsher consequences for non-violent resistance. If we are ever to challenge the status quo policy of "tough love," we've got to have a vocal opposition movement that the Obama administration, the corporations and the Israeli government can see and hear. Its time we kick up the volume and cut off the funding. No more military aid to Israel!



**Pacified**  
by Kathy Kelly

If the U.S. public looked long and hard into a mirror reflecting the civilian atrocities that have occurred in Afghanistan, over the past ten months, we would see ourselves as people who have collaborated

with and paid for war crimes committed against innocent civilians who meant us no harm.

Two reporters, Jerome Starkey, (the Times UK), and David Lindorff, (Counterpunch), along with Prof. Marc W. Herold, have persistently drawn attention to U.S. war crimes committed in Afghanistan. Makers of the film “Rethink Afghanistan” have steadily provided updates about the suffering endured by Afghan civilians. Here is a short list of atrocities that have occurred in the months since General McChrystal assumed his post in Afghanistan.

December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009: U.S.-led forces, (whether soldiers or “security contractors” (mercenaries) is still uncertain), raided a home in Kunar Province and pulled eight young men out of their beds, handcuffed them, and gunned them down execution-style. The Pentagon initially reported that the victims had been running a bomb factory, although distraught villagers were willing to swear that the victims, youngsters, aged 11 – 18, were seven normal schoolboys and one shepherd boy. Following courageous reporting by Jerome Starkey, the U.S. military carried out its own investigation and on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010, issued an apology, attesting the boys’ innocence.

February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010: U.S. and Afghan forces raided a home during a party and killed five people, including a local district attorney, a local police commander, two pregnant mothers and a teenaged girl engaged to be married. Neither Commander Dawood, shot in the doorway of his home while pleading for calm, waving his badge, nor the teenaged Gulalai, died immediately, but the gunmen refused to allow relatives to take them to the hospital. Instead, they forced them to wait for hours barefoot in the winter cold outside.

Despite crowds of witnesses on the scene, the NATO report insisted that the two pregnant women at the party had been found bound and gagged, murdered in an honor killing. A March 16, 2010 U.N. report, following on further reporting by Starkey, exposed the deception, and an April 5, 2010 New York Times article clarifies that the U.S. troops engaged in a deliberate cover-up.

February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010: A three-car convoy of Afghans was traveling to the market in Kandahar with plans to proceed from there to a hospital in Kabul where some of the party could be taken for much-needed medical treatment. U.S. forces saw Afghans

traveling together and launched an air-to-ground attack on the first car. Women in the second car immediately jumped out waving their scarves, trying desperately to communicate that they were civilians. The U.S. helicopter gunships continued firing on the now unshielded women. 21 people were killed and 13 were wounded.

There was press attention for this atrocity and U.S. General Stanley McChrystal issued a videotaped apology for his soldiers’ tragic mistake.

Whether having that gunship in the country was a mistake—or a crime—was never raised as a question.

And who would want it raised? Set amidst the horrors of an ongoing eight-year war, how many Americans think twice about these atrocities, hearing them on the news.

In Germany, a western, relatively comfortable country, citizens raised a sustained protest when their leaders misled them regarding an atrocity that cost many dozens of civilian lives in Afghanistan.

The air strike was conducted by U.S. planes but called in by German forces. On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Taliban fighters in Kunduz province had hijacked two trucks filled with petrol, but then gotten stuck in a quagmire where the trucks had sunk. Locals, realizing that the trucks carried valuable fuel, had arrived in large numbers to siphon it off, but when a German officer at the nearest NATO station learned that over 100 people had assembled in an area under his supervision, he decided they must be insurgents and a threat to Germans under his command. At his call, a U.S. fighter jet bombed the tankers, incinerating 142 people, dozens of them confirmable as civilians.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Germany’s Defense Minister at the time, Franz Josef Jung, held a press conference in which he defended the attack, playing down the presence of civilians. He wasn’t aware that video footage from a US F15 fighter jet showed that most of the people present were unarmed civilians gathering to fill containers with fuel.

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009, after a steady outcry on the part of the German public, the Defense Minister was withdrawn from his post (he is now a Labor Minister) and two German military officials were forced to resign.

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I felt uneasy and sad when I realized that my first response to this story was a feeling of curiosity as to how the public of another country could manage to raise such a furor over deaths of people in faraway Afghanistan.

Worse yet is our general inattention to the suffering endured by Afghanistan's children.

According to a March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 Save the Children report, "The world is ignoring the daily deaths of more than 850 Afghan children from treatable diseases like diarrhea and pneumonia, focusing on fighting the insurgency rather than providing humanitarian aid." The report notes that a quarter of all children born in the country die before the age of five, while nearly 60 percent of children are malnourished and suffer physical or mental problems. The UN Human Development Index in 2009 says that Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, second only to Niger in sub-Saharan Africa.

The proposed U.S. defense budget will cost the U.S. public two billion dollars per day. And President Obama's administration is seeking a 33 billion dollar supplemental to fund wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Most U.S. people are aware of Taliban atrocities and many may believe the U.S. troops are in Afghanistan to protect Afghan villagers from Taliban human rights abuses. At least the mainstream news media in Germany and the UK will air stories of atrocities. The U.S. people are disadvantaged inasmuch as the media and the Pentagon attempt to pacify us, winning our hearts and minds to bankroll ongoing warfare and troop escalation in Afghanistan. Yet it isn't very difficult to pacify U.S. people. We're easily distracted from the war, and when we do note that an atrocity has happened, we seem more likely to respond with a shrug of dismay than with a sustained protest.

It's worthwhile to wonder, how did we become this pacified?

But far more important is our collective effort to approach the mirror, to stay in front of it, unflinching, and see the consequences of our mistaken acquiescence to the tragic horrors of war, and then work, work hard, to nonviolently resist collaboration with war crimes.

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