

# VOICES

## FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

March, 2014

vcnv.org

**“Locked in winter, summer lies  
Gather your bones together—rise!”**

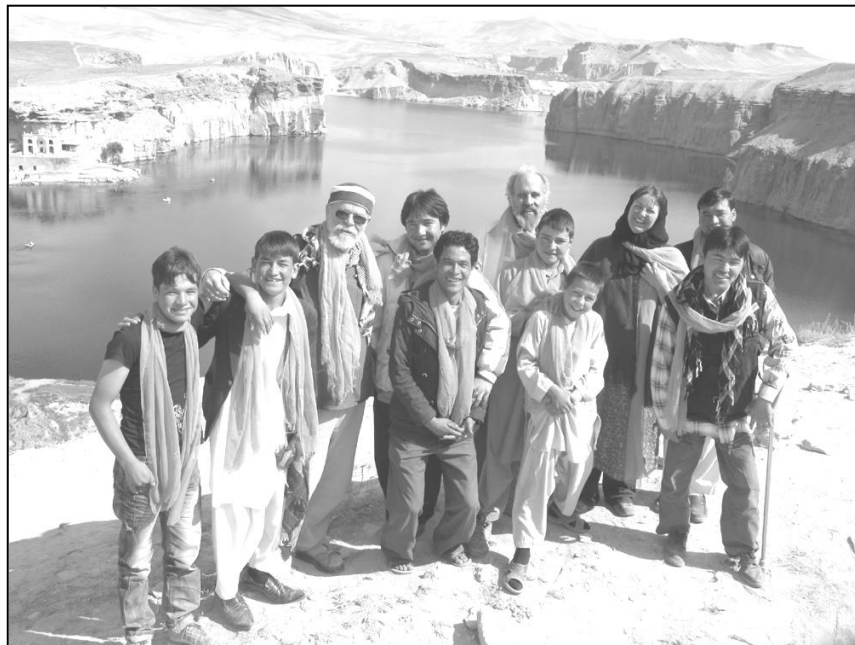
**--Barbara Deming**

**Dear Friends,**

Barbara Deming was a brave, wise peace activist whose writing and witness helped shape campaigns for civil rights, gender rights, disarmament and pacifism.

In the past few months, Voices activists have been encouraged by gatherings of people who share Deming’s vision of a world that is moving beyond war and discrimination.

This newsletter includes reports from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iowa. Ed Kinane, addressing Judge Gideon in a closing statement during the trial of the Hancock 17 in Syracuse, New York, helps us see our responsibility in the face of ongoing wars and 21st century militarism:



**Blue scarves supplied by Afghan Peace Volunteers and often worn by activists at demos and in courtrooms express conviction that national boundaries create artificial divisions. In truth, and again quoting Barbara Deming, “we are all part of one another.”**



“Several of our testifiers referred to the grievance about which we were petitioning and for which we sought redress – that grievance being the protracted war crime committed or being prepared for 24/7 at Hancock by those piloting weaponized Reapers in Afghanistan and who knows where else. Our petition at Hancock on October 25th against such war crime took the form of a people’s indictment co-authored with us by former U.S. attorney general Ramsey Clark. On that date we were not defying law, we were seeking to uphold law.”

We are grateful for the friendship and good example of these peacemakers in warzones here and in places far away.

Sincerely,

**Kathy Kelly, Buddy Bell,  
Cathy Breen, Brian Terrell,  
Nicole Heiden and Sarah  
Stockdale**

# Salt and Terror in Afghanistan

By Kathy Kelly

February 5, 2014

Two weeks ago in a room in Kabul, Afghanistan, I joined several dozen people, working seamstresses, some college students, socially engaged teenagers and a few visiting internationals like myself, to discuss world hunger. Our emphasis was not exclusively on their own country's worsening hunger problems. The Afghan Peace Volunteers, in whose home we were meeting, draw strength from looking beyond their own very real struggles.

With us was Hakim, a medical doctor who spent six years working as a public health specialist in the central highlands of Afghanistan and, prior to that, among refugees in Quetta, Pakistan. He helped us understand conditions that lead to food shortages and taught us about diseases, such as kwashiorkor and marasmus, which are caused by insufficient protein or general malnutrition.

We looked at UN figures about hunger in Afghanistan which show malnutrition rates rising by 50% or more compared with 2012. The malnutrition ward at Helmand Province's Bost Hospital has been admitting 200 children a month for severe, acute malnutrition — four times more than in January 2012.

A recent New York Times article about the worsening hunger crisis described an encounter with a mother and child in an Afghan hospital: "In another bed is Fatima, less than a year old, who is so severely malnourished that her heart is failing, and the doctors expect that she will soon die unless her father is able to find money to take her to Kabul for surgery. The girl's face bears a perpetual look of utter terror, and she rarely stops crying."

Photos of Fatima and other children in the ward accompanied the article. In our room in Kabul, Hakim projected the photos on the wall. They were painful to see and so were the nods of comprehension from Afghans all too familiar with the agonies of poverty in a time of war.

As children grow, they need iodine to enable proper brain development. According to a UNICEF/GAIN report, "iodine deficiency is the most prevalent cause of brain damage worldwide. It is easily preventable, and through ongoing targeted interventions, can be eliminated." As recently as 2009 we learned that 70% of Afghan children faced an iodine deficiency.

Universal Salt Iodization (USI) is recognized as a simple, safe and cost-effective measure in addressing iodine

deficiency. The World Bank reports that it costs \$.05 per child, per year.

In 2012, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) announced a four-year project which aimed to reach nearly half of Afghanistan's population - 15 million Afghans - with fortified foods. Their strategy was to add vitamins and minerals such as iron, zinc, folic acid, Vitamin B-12 and Vitamin A to wheat flour, vegetable oil and ghee, and also to fortify salt with iodine. The project costs 6.4 million dollars.

The sums of money required to fund delivery of iodine and fortified foods to malnourished Afghan children should be compared, I believe, to the sums of money that the Pentagon's insatiable appetite for war-making has required of U.S. people.

The price tag for supplying iodized salt to one child for one year is 5 cents.

The cost of maintaining one U.S. soldier has recently risen to 2.1 million dollars per year. The amount of money spent to keep three U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan in 2014 could almost cover the cost of a four year program to deliver fortified foods to 15 million Afghan people.

Maj. Gen. Kurt J. Stein, who is overseeing the draw-down of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, has referred to the operation as "the largest retrograde mission in history." The mission will cost as much

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as \$6 billion.

Over the past decade, spin doctors for U.S. military spending have suggested that Afghanistan needs the U.S. troop presence and U.S. non-military spending to protect the interests of women and children. It's true that non-military aid to Afghanistan, sent by the U.S. since 2002, now approaches 100 billion dollars.

Yet several articles on Afghanistan's worsening hunger crisis, appearing in the Western press, prompt readers to ask how Afghanistan could be receiving vast sums of non-military aid and yet still struggle with severe acute malnourishment among children under age five.

Funds have been available for tanks, guns, bullets, helicopters, missiles, weaponized drones, drone surveillance, Joint Special Operations task forces, bases, airstrips, prisons, and truck delivered supplies for tens of thousands of troops. But funds are in short supply for children too weak to cry who are battling for their lives while wasting away.

A whole generation of Afghans and other people

around the developing world see the true results of Westerners' self-righteous claim for the need to keep civilians "safe" through war. They see the terror, entirely justified, filling Fatima's eyes in her hospital bed.



In that room in Kabul, as my friends learned about the stark realities of hunger — and among them, I know, were some who worry about hunger in their own families — I could see a rejection both of panic and of revenge in the eyes of the people around me. Their steady thoughtfulness was an inspiration.

Panic and revenge among far more prosperous people in the U.S. helped to drive the U.S. into a war waged against one of the poorest countries in the world. Yet, my Afghan friends, who've borne the brunt of war, long to rise above vengeance and narrow self-interest. They wish to pursue a peace that includes ending hunger.

## Open our Eyes

By Hakim (Dr. Teck Young-Wee)

Even from kindergarten, my 'inner' eye was being blinded to alternative ways of learning other than a test-based approach. Unconsciously, I was motivated to believe, "This is education - reading and writing the English and Chinese alphabet well enough to be some 'meritocratic' top student." Many decades later, during a three-month peace workshop at Bamiyan University, the student participants identified illiteracy as one of the main reasons for the chronic wars in Afghanistan. My awareness had revolutionized, so I disagreed and offered, "The unlettered Afghan shepherd is usually enraptured by care for his sheep. He does not sit on councils to pen justifications for expending blood and money to wage wars. His illiteracy does not cause wars."

Asad (not his real name) had become a young journalist, certainly literate, and educated, by conventional definitions. At a meeting of the showcase 'Afghan Youth Parliament of Bamiyan Province', this Hazara, wearing tinted glasses and a Western success-style coat, had concluded, "The Taliban are mainly Pashtun. If I took

power someday, I will eliminate them."

These days, think tanks, and these not even military think tanks, will praise this 'realistic' strategy, and perhaps even recruit Asad. Asad's eyebrows were contorted with prejudice and anger. His breath seemed to be puffs from 'fighter jets'. The war will rage on in his personal and social life, along with the academic degrees he'll frame and display in his bright-future office.

If I were an angel, I would have let in as much sunlight into that meeting room as possible, encouraged him to ease his frown, and enrolled him in a visionary kindergarten, where, after 5 minutes of "A,B,C" and "آ, ب, پ", I would introduce him to a 5 year old Pashtun boy, and suggest, "Go out to the park together for the next 50 minutes. Look and listen attentively without alphabets distracting your minds, so as to understand how many different kinds of insects and birds there are and to appreciate their songs. Study how the snow leopard is endangered even though it won't make you a high-dollar earning oil-driller, mineral-extracting corporatist, or the first financial derivatives trader in Afghanistan."

"Remove the adult tinted glasses, and open your eyes."

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### *This month at the Voices House:*

As we write, Kathy is accompanying two Afghan peace volunteers, Zarghuna and Torpekai, to India to visit intentional communities there and to participate in a conference on grassroots women's leadership. They are accompanied by Maya Evans, of Voices for Creative Nonviolence UK and Dr. Hakim, of the APV. It is expected that these young women will be the first residents of a new live-in community of female Afghan Peace Volunteers. Follow their journey on [ourjourneytosmile.org](http://ourjourneytosmile.org).

This winter, the Duvet Project has provided 2,000 blankets to people in need of warmth in Afghanistan.

In December, Nicole Heiden, a language student at DePaul, moved into the Voices house after having spent some time interning for us.

Sarah Stockdale, a student at Colorado College, is interning for two months.

We said goodbye to Tom Hueser, a beloved intern, who left to visit family in New York City. Buddy Bell and Brian Terrell continue to hold down the fort, and Lagrima the cat is often found asleep on the couch.



## Drone Activism Update

**January 17 – Hancock 17 members released from Justice Center Jail in Syracuse, NY.** On Friday, February 7, Town of DeWitt (NY) Court Judge David Gideon had found them guilty of Disorderly Conduct for their nonviolent civil resistance action at Hancock Air Base in 2012, and they were sentenced to 15 days in jail (starting immediately) and a \$250 fine with a \$125 court surcharge. The resisters are part of the Upstate NY Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars, which seeks to educate the public and Hancock Air Base personnel about the war crimes perpetrated in Afghanistan with the MQ-9 Reaper Drone piloted from Hancock Air National Guard Base.

**February 3- Wheatland 4 found guilty of trespassing, sentenced to ten hours of community service.** The “Wheatland 4”, Toby, Robin, Martha and Bill, were arrested in April last year, while protesting drone warfare at Beale AFB. They were found guilty of trespassing after a day-long trial in a Sacramento Federal Court on Monday, February 3. In last April’s protest, over a dozen activists blocked the main traffic artery into the base for over an hour. When highway patrol arrived to break up the blockade, five of the protesters proceeded to enter base property to deliver a letter to the base commander, Col. Phil Stewart.

**February 18- Oak Ridge Nuclear Protesters Sentenced from 5-6 years each for 2012 sabotage at the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tenn.** Federal District Judge Amul Thapar sentenced Sister Megan Rice to 35 months, and fellow protesters Greg Boertje-Obed and Michael Walli to 62 months in prison, less than the federal guidelines of six-to-nine years. The nun and her two accomplices broke into the facility grounds by cutting through three fences with bolt cutters and sneaking past dogs and armed guards and a sign warning that trespassers risk becoming subject to deadly force. Once inside, the protesters splattered human blood on the wall of a \$548 million storage bunker containing much of the nation’s bomb-grade uranium, spray painted Biblical slogans of peace, and defaced the exterior of the complex with a hammer.

## Making Iowa into a War Zone

By Brian Terrell

The F-16 jets are gone and the Iowa Air National Guard base at the Des Moines International Airport will soon be a command center for unmanned aerial vehicles, UAVs, called drones. The MQ-9 Reaper drones will not be coming to Iowa but will be launched from bases overseas. When airborne, these unmanned planes will be flown by remote control via satellite from Des Moines. Classified by the military as a “Hunter-Killer platform,” the MQ-9 is armed with Hellfire missiles and 500 pound bombs that will be launched by airmen sitting at computer terminals here.

We are told that drones can discriminate between the good and the bad, limiting “collateral damage” and allowing our soldiers to engage in combat from a safe distance of thousands of miles, often without even leaving their home towns. The promises of better war through technology, however, prove false. Rather than limiting the scope of war, drones are expanding it, killing more civilians, endangering our soldiers and the safety of our communities. Instead of keeping the horrors of war at a safe distance, drones bring the war home in unprecedented ways.

Speaking last May, President Obama contended that “conventional airpower and missiles are far less precise than drones, and likely to cause more civilian casualties and local outrage.” A study by the National Defense University, however, finds that drone strikes in Afghanistan are “an order of magnitude more likely to result in civilian casualties per engagement” than manned aircraft. Concerning “local outrage,” former commander of US forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, warns against drones making enemies: “The resentment created by American use of unmanned strikes ... is much greater than the average American appreciates. They are hated on a visceral level, even by people who’ve never seen one or seen the effects of one.” Drone strikes targeting suspected terrorists have been condemned by the governments of countries where they happen and by various United Nations agencies and human rights organizations as illegal assassinations.

Distance from the battlefield does not isolate soldiers from posttraumatic stress or the moral injury of war. One former Air Force drone operator, Brandon Bryant, says that his work made him into a “heartless sociopath.” While drone pilots are at a greater distance from their victims, the video feed they watch brings them closer: “Artillery doesn’t see the results of their actions,” Bryant says. “It’s really more intimate for us, because we see everything.” Another former operator, Heather Linebaugh, reports of colleagues committing suicide and of watching children incinerated by Hellfire missiles. She has watched US soldiers die in Afghanistan “because our ever-so-accurate UAVs were unable to detect an IED that awaited their convoy.”

Iowa’s “citizen soldiers” will soon be engaged in real time combat from the Des Moines International Airport. “In an F-16, your whole mission was to train to go to war,” said a pilot of an Ohio Air Guard wing that made a similar change from fighters to drones. “In this mission, we go to war every day.”

Reason and the rules of war both suggest that assassinations and acts of war by the Guard from its base in Des Moines will make that airport a military target, putting Iowans at peril. Drone warfare is based on the lie that war can be made more exact, limited and humane through technology. Our civilian and military authorities are acting recklessly and against domestic and international law, without regard for the safety and wellbeing of our troops, of the people of Iowa or of people in faraway places who otherwise would mean us no harm. Rather than providing an answer, drones perpetuate and multiply the horrors of war and bring them home into our communities.

*Brian Terrell is a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence. His article was published in The Des Moines Register on February 2, 2014. You can find a longer version on [vcnv.org](http://vcnv.org).*

## Refugees in Their Own Country

By Cathy Breen. Feb. 5, 2014

“We are refugees in our own country!” a soft-spoken Sunni gentleman said this morning at the site where Fallujans are being housed in Karbala. But he was quick to add, “It is better than being refugees outside our country,” referring to Syria. I had read in the U.S. alternative media that Karbala, a Shia area, was taking in families fleeing the military attacks on their Sunni city, Fallujah. Karbala, a Shia city, is only 90 miles from Fallujah.

Karbala has three large compounds called “Visitors’ Cities,” each with a capacity to house thousands of pilgrims who come to visit the holy shrine of Imam Hussein and the shrine of his brother, Abbas. I was able to visit one of the compounds this morning, which has been home to Fallujans since Iraqi forces began their assault in early January on “terrorists.”

At the Visitor City they are doing everything possible to provide for all the needs of those coming: clothes, food, schools for the children, financial aid, soccer games, medical care, and buses into town. The chief official of the site explained, “We don’t want them to feel like refugees. We want them to feel that this is their home. We are all one family. We want to send a message to all the world that there is no difference between Shia and Sunni. ... We are preparing to receive many more people because we believe the fighting will continue.”

“They began coming on Jan. 5th in very small numbers...because they were fearful. When they saw

that they were safe and treated like brothers, they sent word to their families. On Jan. 7th they began to arrive in greater numbers.” Now, less than a month later, there are between 1,000 and 2,000 in this compound, and they are still coming. We saw a man who had arrived with his family yesterday.

It has been said that the way we learn history shapes how we think about the present and the future. I was very mindful today speaking with one of the refugees from Fallujah of the destruction my country wrought on theirs, especially the two massive attacks we carried out on Fallujah in April and November of 2004. Before leaving, I felt the need to at least acknowledge these shameful acts.

A refugee from Fallujah has strong words for us this morning. “The American forces destroyed our country and the relationships between us... I have a son who is 32 years old. He has only known war.” The TV news is on as I write you. Live footage from bombs in Baghdad today at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as an area where a dear friend of ours lives.

The family from Baghdad who visited me yesterday in Karbala was able to take two packages to friends in Baghdad. One was for the friend living near the bombing. I just got an email from him that he was able

to retrieve the package today and deliver the other package. The last part of the email leaves me shaken to my core. I have made a few minor adjustments for easier reading and I have also changed the names.

“Everybody happy with the lovely contents of the envelope. You don’t know how Zayneb [5yr daughter] felt happy to get photo of Sofia [also 5yr from states] and her family.

She will soon draw picture, and as we cannot send it to them, so I will take picture and attach it to email. I went to Ali with the 2nd envelope. He was very happy to get your letter, and he appreciate your effort, he invite me to have tea but I apologize to him because situation wasn’t stable in Baghdad today. Just two hours ago two car bombs were bombed in [area where he lives], around 24 person were killed and injured. We don’t know what the reaction of this bomb will be. These car bombs were bombs in front of Sunna houses, victims mainly were kids who were playing in front of their houses. anyway Cathy keep in touch and take care.”

Here, joy and suffering exist side by side. Inseparable.



# Kabul on a Key Meter

by Ewa Jasiewicz

**"Here are seeds for change that can go global..."**



**Ewa in Kabul**

I've been in Kabul a week now, living in the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteer (APV) house on the border of District 3. The area is a mish-mash of wealthy mirror-windowed mansions fronted by surly gun-on-the-lap security guards, crumbling mudhuts, open sewers, children in ragged clothes warming themselves on burning rubbish, a fake McDonalds and Subway with directly lifted logos, and Kabul's sole waterpark, for men only and 500 Afghanis a dip. One disc of naan bread is 10 Afghanis (around 18 cents) and the women working on the APV's duvet-making project get 150 Afghanis per duvet, a two hour job, and make 3 per day, earning \$8 per day in total – a relatively decent wage compared to most people in the precarious work sector who earn between \$1-5 per day.

Men wait for work on the 'Red Bridge', a 10 minute walk from us. It crosses the Kabul River, once free flowing but now a stagnant mud swamp, flanked with bags of rotting rubbish and opium addicts crouching in the shallows. Child workers take their breaks in chip shops and at Bolani stands (Bolani is a deep fried pastry filled with potato, green chilies and squash) swaggery and manly like mini 40-year-olds.

Everything feels on the brink here. The unemployment rate (stats apply to men only) is officially 30% but unofficially twice as high. Most work is precarious: street vending, cart pushing, tailoring and shop work – the main ones seem to cater for just-in-time-survival – car spare parts, all manner of appliance and home –

repairs and replacements, wood for home heating by stove, food, and gas sold not by the canister but by the kilogram. Catering for 10 (the number in our 'family' right now) involving boiling tea to have with all meals and a few times between for guests plus a hot lunch and dinner of simple rice and beans or okra or fried eggs, amounts to 1200 Afghanis around \$21 per month. Many families can't count on a regular income and there's no system of social security from the government despite the \$100 billion given by the USA and the £37 billion by the UK for 'reconstruction' pumped into the country since 2001.

Aid drops – there have been to four so far – can turn desperate and hectic with those not registered with APV or refugee camp authorities being turned away empty outstretched-handed. At a recent drop in Charman-e-Hozuri, by Voices for Creative Non Violence, we met camp elders, who uniquely for Afghanistan, were women. Strong, commanding, faces uncovered, and steely eyed, they shouted into a crowd slipping and clamouring in ice and mud to get hold of 500 tins of high quality cooking oil being doled out at one per family. The women stood between armed police and the crowd, gesticulating assertively and shouting orders to the men around them. The police facilitated the drop, even giving themselves 3 canisters of the oil. Corruption, militarized and violent, is rife here. Policemen's real wages seem to be bribes. Afghanistan ranks as the third most corrupt country in the world after Somalia and North Korea.

Most people seem to be surviving on handouts, money sent by family from abroad and precarious work. At one refugee camp opposite the gleaming Paris Hotel, home to 700 families from all ethnic backgrounds who were returnees from decades of exile in Pakistan and Iran, the main work seems to be cart-pushing and washing the clothes of wealthy NGO workers. The displaced live in mud-brick shelters and fortified tents, everything caked in the ubiquitous Kabul dust in part due to the unpaved, rocky and disintegrating roads. The

fact they can't afford secure housing is also due to the Aid Industry and corporate influx over the past decade, which has seen rents rise to higher than in London. I was told of one apartment in the City Centre on Flower Street that was costing a German freelance journalist and her two co-sharers \$2700 per month (with a maid thrown in). Maya Evans here, a good old friend and Voices for Creative Non-Violence co-coordinator put it well – she said it's like the whole city's running on a keymeter. It's a metaphor borrowed from the Fuel Poverty Action work I'm doing in the UK, organizing around the scandal of those on pre-payment meters, always on the brink of darkness, struggling to top-up and when they can't, being regularly plunged into the cold and dark because of poverty and profiteering companies. Here we're cut off every other day and the freezing, dank, dusty cold envelopes everything.

Where's the way out of this systemic and violently enforced powerlessness? According to UNESCO 82% of women and 50% of men are illiterate, rising to 90% of women and 60% of men in rural areas which is where most people live. At least 2500 Afghan women committed suicide in 2012. 60% of the population is under 25 and 60% of children are malnourished. Accessible free education is a thing of the distant past. State schools are few and far between with many teachers having left the country. If they can afford it, parents put their children through private schools but most can't. Religious schools and further education can still be found for free but the education is narrow in its' scope. Universities charge on average 50,000 Afghanis (\$1000) per year of study. I met one Economics student from Kandahar who said he wasn't really learning anything at University. They lacked books, good teachers, materials and up-to-date information in Dari. NGOs and Aid are big business, grooming an English-speaking elite, many of whom squat the upper rungs of the socio-economic ladder before making a break for the ultimate destination: up and out of the country.

If this sounds dystopian, it's because it is. But there are also a sizable number of Afghan men, women and youth working to challenge corruption, the class system, sectarianism, misogyny and violence in all its' forms. The

APV are one such rare group. Totally grassroots and funded by like-minded grassroots peace groups from all over the world, they are independent of political parties and radical in their commitment to building safer spaces and anti-oppression in action. They carry a vision of a borderless world where war and economic, social, cultural and political violence can be abolished. A guiding philosophy is that the means by which we organize have to reflect the ends we want to see.

They're walking the talk and have been building integrity and trust since they emerged from Bamiyan six years ago, as a small group of Hazara youth taught by Singaporean Doctor Hakim (Wi Tek Young) gone native after 10 years in the country. They're now composed of Hazara, Pashtun and Tajik community members and are looking for Uzbek participants in order to create the lived conditions for co-existence and co-operation between ethnic identities in a country where mixing between different groups is rare, and where sectarian violence and prejudice are rife.



**APV School**

The APV are hugely inspiring, and the work they do, the journeys they have been on and who they are reclaiming, re-generates and re-defines the much abused, co-opted and discredited concept of 'peace' in a country where war has been the dominant language for decades. To respond to dystopia with an active creation of a utopia is a huge act of rebellion and one that we can all learn from as the world we live in becomes more and more oppressive. From Kabul to England, from the war we've exported to the ongoing class war at home – here are seeds for change that can go global.

# VOICES

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“Panic and revenge among far more prosperous people in the U.S. helped to drive the U.S. into a war waged against one of the poorest countries in the world. Yet, my Afghan friends, who’ve borne the brunt of war, long to rise above vengeance and narrow self-interest. They wish to pursue a peace that includes ending hunger.”

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MARCH 2014 NEWSLETTER

“Seen from the air at night, Helmand’s huge Western military installations look like a giant spaceship, a great blob of blazing lights amid a dark sea of desert. At the height of the Western occupation, the camps used more electricity than the rest of the province put together.” ... “Every drop of fuel for the generators had to be shipped in through Pakistan, along with every drop of mineral water and every bite of food consumed by the troops. ...how has it been possible to bring all that stuff in by road through areas of Pakistan controlled largely by the Pakistani Taliban, allied to the Afghan Taliban...? The answer appears to be that the Taliban tax these NATO convoys as they tax all other trade in the region: Obtaining tax revenues from mineral water, fruit juice, hamburgers, and other NATO necessities that do them no harm at all is, it turns out, far more advantageous than interrupting our supply routes. In other words, all these years NATO has actually been subsidizing the Taliban’s war effort.”



Anatol Lieven in *Afghanistan: The Desert of Death*