

Stanislaus CONNECTIONS

Working for peace, justice and a sustainable environment



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Eleven and a half reasons to vote against Proposition 23

By **BRAD BARKER, Yokuts Chair, Sierra Club**

“The most important vote Californians cast in November may not be in the governor’s race but on Proposition 23,” began a recent *San Jose Mercury News* editorial against the suspension of AB 32, California’s landmark law on climate change.

Through cap-and-trade incentives and by promoting clean energy, AB 32, also known as “The Global Warming Solutions Act,” would reduce California’s greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020. But the law is under attack from Proposition 23, a ballot measure funded primarily by the fossil fuel industry, and by some of the biggest polluters in the state. Prop. 23 would suspend AB 32 until California’s unemployment rate drops below 5.5% for a full year, effectively nullifying the law for years.

As of early September, the supporters of Prop. 23 had raised \$8,221,096. Of that total, 97% came from oil interests, 89% came from out of state, and 80% came from Valero, Tesoro, and Koch Industries.

Do you need more reasons to vote NO on Prop. 23?

Forward-thinking California businesses have already created thousands of green tech jobs and invested billions of dollars in clean energy to prepare for AB 32 (and because it’s the right thing to do.) Letting dirty players off the hook gives polluters an unfair competitive advantage.

The extraction, processing and delivery of fossil fuels are dirty, dangerous businesses. In just the past year we’ve had horrible coal mining accidents, the biggest oil spill in U.S. history, and a deadly pipeline explosion in San Bruno. Perhaps it’s time for cleaner energy?

Continued dependence on foreign oil is bad for national security. We end up giving billions of dollars to governments and cartels who hate our freedoms.

AB 32 would lower emissions of both greenhouse gases and toxic pollutants. California’s unhealthy air would become more breathable – less asthma attacks and other respiratory problems, and less premature death from bad air. The American Lung Association has come out strongly against Prop. 23.

AB 32 as written is a flexible law that will

be phased in gradually. And the law already allows the governor to suspend certain requirements on a year-to-year basis to accommodate economic hardships.

Prop. 23’s language is so broad that any state laws regulating greenhouse gas emissions could be in jeopardy and could lead to years of expensive litigation.

Unsurprisingly, oil company projections about AB 32 are completely skewed. Their reports ignore the economic benefits of reduced pollution, reduced health care costs, energy efficiency, long term energy costs and thousands of green tech jobs.

Despite the rhetoric from polluters, many business leaders are against Prop. 23, and many others are choosing to stay out of the fight. Shell Oil, P. G. & E., Sempra Energy, Google, eBay and hundreds of other busi-

nesses oppose the initiative. Chevron Oil and the California Chamber of Commerce are officially neutral. BP and Exxon Mobil have stayed silent.

By the way, the real “Climategate” is that our planet is warming faster than previous models have predicted. The first half of 2010 was the hottest six months ever recorded, and the ten hottest years on record all occurred within the last fifteen years. Retreating back to dirty energy is not an option.

California must continue as a role model and a world leader in environmental policy.

It’s a clear choice. Either we have a future that embraces clean energy and green technology, or we have a future where oil and coal companies continue to rig public policies against the public interest.

ACTION: Vote No on Proposition 23.

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We look forward to seeing you and your friends.

American Muslims this 9/11

By **MAHAN MIRZA**

Three events are coming together in relation to Islam on the upcoming anniversary of 9/11: The Koran burning organized by a small Christian congregation in Florida, the ongoing controversy over the Ground Zero mosque and the annual Islamic festival of Eid to mark the culmination of the holy month of Ramadan. Each of these issues warrants a different response from Muslims. With respect to Eid, we should be flexible. Regarding the mosque (which is not really a “mosque”), we should stand firm. As for the Koran burning,

Regarding the mosque controversy, let us consider the facts. It is not a mosque, but a cultural center that will be open to members of all faiths.

we should extend forgiveness.

Eid will fall either on Sept. 10 or 11, depending on how a local community interprets

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Sunday Afternoons at CBS

BY TINA ARNOPOLE DRISKILL

Sunday Afternoons at CBS brings the music with beyond-words awesome Rudolf Budginas, Lithuanian-born “young-hip” Victor Borge-like” pianist, October 10 as part of the 19th Annual Sunday Afternoons at CBS concert series.

All concerts are held on Sunday afternoons at 3 p.m. Season tickets are \$50 seniors and students, \$60 adults and \$5 for children accompanied by a season ticket holder. Individual concert tickets are \$20 adults, \$15 seniors and students, and \$7 children. For tickets call 571-6060 weekday mornings, or at the door. Group tickets can be arranged.

The season also includes:

November 14, 2010: The EDLOS - The fabulous four A

Capella Masters bid farewell during their final tour.

January 16, 2011: Cookie Jar - A delicious reach with Darin Morris and top area musicians into a mix of unplugged Latin, jazz, swing, blues and just flat out good music.

February 13, 2011: Grace Lieberman and Friends - Sunday Afternoons at CBS’ musical gift to the Stanislaus area community.

March 13, 2011: Fishtank Ensemble - High energy “Cross-Pollinated Gypsy Music,” a bit of klezmer, Flamenco, and more with powerful vocals and instrumentals.

ACTION: Visit www.cbsmodesto.org/concerts for information. Listen to the music by going to the individual artist websites, which are listed.

“For Goodness Sake”

The captivating Elaine Blanchard takes all the parts in the one-woman play, “For Goodness Sake,” about the friendship between a white boy and black girl in the South of the 1950s. Two performances at College Avenue Congregational Church, 1341 College Ave. at Orangeburg at 7 p.m. Friday, October 8 and Saturday, October 9. Tickets are \$10 and are available in the church office, 522-7244. Addressing racism, sexism and religion, the play is for mature audiences only.

Actor, storyteller and writer Elaine Blanchard is a registered nurse who worked for twenty years in acute care settings. She is an ordained minister who preaches and tells stories in churches and other venues around the country.

Her first book, *Help Me Remember*, was published in 2005. Her short fiction has won Honorable Mention in the 2008 Memphis Magazine Fiction Contest. To hear her read

her original work, go to www.PorchSwingStories.com.

Elaine has been trained in nonviolent conflict resolution through Marshall Rosenberg’s Center for Nonviolent Communication www.cnvc.org. She is licensed in family mediation.

Elaine interviews nursing home residents, writes their stories and frames them as “I Am” stories to hang over their beds. It is a way to let visitors and caregivers know more about the person they are serving. She also interviews children and helps them write stories about their life experiences. She facilitates a class, “Prison Stories: Past, Present and Future,” at Shelby County Correctional Center for Women. Twice a week the class meets. Over a four-month period, each class of twelve participants builds trust, shares stories and creates a dramatic staged production for the entire prison population.

Exciting Civic Engagement Project Events

The Modesto Junior College Civic Engagement Project Fall Film & Lecture Series presents timely events and films that are FREE to the public.

Friday, October 8: Candidates Forum for Superior Court and Yosemite Community College District Board of Trustees: Sponsored by the Civic Engagement Project, Associated Students of MJC and moderated by the League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County; 6:30 p.m., Music Recital Hall, Room 108, on MJC East Campus. The audience may ask questions.

Thursday, October 14: Forum-Pros and Cons of California Ballot Measures. Sponsored by the Civic Engagement Project, ASMJC and League of Women Voters. 7 p.m. in Music Recital Hall, Room 108, on East Campus. The audience is invited to ask questions.

Friday, October 15: Symposium: “Employment in Stanislaus County: Where have we been, where are we going?” 1:00 p.m. – 5 p.m. in Sierra Hall 132 on MJC’s West Campus. The event will include a town hall discussion that delves into the issue of local unemployment and strives to identify some possible solutions. Symposium speakers include Bill Bassett, executive director of Stanislaus Alliance; George Boodrookas, dean of community and economic development at MJC; David Hosley, executive director of

the Great Valley Center; Jim DeMartini, Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors; Larry Giventer, professor, California State University, Stanislaus, and Brian Kline, organic farmer. For information, contact Professor Bill Anelli, 575-6152, or Professor Michael Smedshammer, 575-6490.

Civic Engagement Project Films

All films shown at 7 p.m. in Forum 110 on MJC’s East Campus.

Wednesday, October 13: *Second Skin*. This 2008 documentary follows avid gamers whose lives have been changed, in both positive and negative ways, because of multi-player online role-playing games such as *World of Warcraft*, *Everquest*, and *Second Life*. As it explores the allure of virtual worlds, the film reveals interesting social, psychological, and economic factors at play in the real world amidst today’s online adventurers.

Wednesday, October 27: *God Grew Tired of Us*. In the late nineties, 25,000 boys who became orphans during the Civil War in Southern Sudan became known as the “Lost Boys.” This Sundance winning film follows three Lost Boys from their villages to a refugee camp in Kenya and finally to America, where they build new lives while remaining committed to those they left behind. Nearly 4,000 Lost Boys came to America in one of the largest repatriations of modern times.



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The Peace Essay Contest Needs Your Help!

Dear Friends of the Peace Essay Contest,

The Peace Essay Contest has been an important event in our community for the past 24 years. Over the years thousands of students have written on a variety of topics relating to peace and justice, the environment and peacemakers. They have shared a myriad of ideas about how people can live together more peacefully, thereby making our world a better place to live, work and grow.

The Peace Essay Contest is in a time of transition. Due to a number of factors, this year there will not be a Peace Essay Contest for students to enter. We realize that this may be sad news for those of you who have long supported the contest. The 25th Peace Essay Contest will actually be held during the 2011-2012 school year, giving us more time to fund the project, complete the tasks, and explore options for more help.

Several realities have come together that led to this decision:

- The core group of volunteers who have done the work of

the Peace Essay Contest has dwindled significantly;

- School districts no longer maintain publicly available class assignments making getting the flyer to teachers a complicated process;
- With the turmoil in education teachers are especially stressed this year;
- Our reception location, the MJC West Campus MSR Building, is unavailable for use in spring 2011 due to construction.

If you are willing to join our Committee or help with specific tasks, please let us know. Without more help, we may need to consider making the Peace Essay Contest an every-other-year project. There are a number of specific task "pieces" that could be done by someone who is not on the committee, but would be much appreciated. Please use the contact information below if you are interested in finding out the ways you could help this project continue.

As always, we appreciate your interest, ideas and sup-

port. Please accept our abundant thanks for what you've done through the years as we all encourage student writers to think about what it takes to make our world a more peaceful and just place. Use the contact information listed below if you have questions.

In peace and hope,
2011-12 Peace Essay Contest Committee
Margaret Barker, Indira Clark, Pam Franklin, Elaine Gorman, Deborah Roberts, Sandy Sample and Shelly Scribner

Contact Information:

Email: peaceessay@juno.com

Phone: 209-523-8445, Sandy Sample



The road to balanced transportation still rocky

By ALEXANDER BRITAIN

What form of transportation do you use to go to work? How do you go to the store? For most of us, the answer is a motor vehicle, by necessity. Why is that the case? That answer isn't so obvious. It's not just because work or shopping is "too far." It is because of the way our towns are laid out, which got that way because of the planning people have made in previous generations. (The car cabal that contributed to this thinking—and the virtual elimination of serious public transportation as the car was coming into its own—is not within the realm of this article).

For the past three or four generations, our society has been built with the assumption that cars will be our primary mode of transportation. Any development these days requires a certain amount of off-street parking based on a formula relative to the size of the business. In fact, it is often difficult to access many business parks, hospitals or affordable housing without great difficulty unless you arrive by a car.

By making the automobile the basis for urban and transportation planning, all other modes are necessarily of secondary (or tertiary) importance resulting in a multiplicity of unintended or unforeseen consequences, including: incredible amounts of greenhouse gases, obesity and its attendant diseases, pollution from both the manufacture and use of automobiles, and an economy "held hostage" to its addic-

tion to fossil fuels (and all the political consequences that follow—many of which are discussed in this issue).

Of course, you know all that. The fact remains that current planning for the future, in most but not all cases, has kept that paradigm. Recent transportation planning, while striving to be more "balanced," has included more bike paths, pedestrian walkways and attempts at encouraging public transportation. This is good, of course, but it's not exactly "balanced." There is still a woefully insufficient bike and pedestrian infrastructure, not to mention other decent transit options. The problem lies both in the mindset of planners as well as the details of implementation. Typically, the attempts to meet acceptable levels of service for motor vehicles in the process of policy making, speaks of alternative transportation methods in the language of suggestion—"should" or "encourage"—rather than the language of requirement—"shall."

In short, transportation planning for the city and county (respectively, and generally speaking, applicable to all parts of California, urban and rural) does not maximize suitable multi-modal usage. Measuring Level of Service for motor vehicles is *assumed*, yet the same standards for various other transportation modes are not *required*. Furthermore, in suggesting what "should" be done in providing for alternative modes of transportation, the very language denies the existence for a responsible party for implementing the policy, thus

preserving the status quo, which is egregiously unbalanced.

To achieve a goal of balanced transportation, there must first be a definition of what "balanced transportation" is. Certainly, it would seem reasonable to suggest that balanced choices is an integral part of that. If being concerned for your safety in biking on any of the major streets of Modesto is a reality, or walking from Trader Joes to the mall is not a viable safe option, it would seem that they aren't really part of a balance of choices.

There is regional planning via the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint involving folks from one end to the other of the Valley as well as the County's Council of Governments' (StanCOG) own planning, not to mention respective city councils throughout the county, all of which solicit citizen input. Each of these governmental entities is working on alternatives for transportation problems (e.g., congestion, pollution, sprawl, etc.), but they may need to be "pushed" a bit harder to achieve the goal of truly balanced transportation opportunities. The sooner the better.

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Dialogue demands more courage than war

By HAIDER AL-MOSAWI

Kuwait City - The recent controversy over the Freedom Flotilla heading to Gaza with humanitarian aid has sparked heated debates in every venue where people exchange their opinions, online and off.

However, it isn't only the violence that occurred on the flotilla that deserves our attention, but also the attitude with which people throughout the world approach the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Following this incident, I had a few discussions with several of my Facebook friends from both sides of the conflict. Unfortunately in these discussions the only commonality I saw was the refusal to acknowledge other points of view. Members of each side select only certain facts that support their own perspectives and conveniently ignore everything else. Those who support the Palestinians stressed the facts that the flotilla was in international waters and those on board were humanitarian aid workers. On the other hand, those who support the Israelis pointed to the video of Israeli soldiers being beaten by the flotilla's activists once they boarded the ship.

Rather than listening to what the other side has to say, both sides assume that they already know what the other side thinks so they invest no effort in listening and engaging in constructive dialogue.

It's not that we can't have civil discussions where we listen to others and reconsider our own ideas. It's that we refuse to have civil discussions. This is something that my friends who I discussed the flotilla situation with readily admitted to.

"This is war," they said. We can't engage in dialogue "while people are starving for supplies in the Gaza strip" or when the "Palestinians pose a threat to Israel's security."

"It's time for action, not time to talk." This is a common attitude in conflict situations and, not surprisingly, its also what makes them worse.

It's important to empathise with those directly involved in and influenced by conflict, but we can't assume that we live in the same conditions.

A widow in Gaza worrying about how she will keep her

children safe will certainly not be thinking of ways to convince Israeli soldiers to sit at a table for constructive dialogue. Likewise, an Israeli Defense Forces soldier instructed to land on a ship will not think of asking club-waving passengers: "Can't we all just get along?"

But just because the people living in the heart of conflicts do not have opportunities to engage in dialogue does not mean that people across the globe cannot make a positive contribution in promoting understanding. Every individual belongs to a number of social circles: friends, colleagues or community members. We encounter many opportunities for fruitful dialogue on a daily basis, and it's important to make the most of these opportunities to advance a peaceful approach to conflict situations.

Dialogue demands more courage than waging war. It takes you to that uncomfortable space where you have to question your own assumptions and, rather than speak on other people's behalf, truly listen to what they have to say, take it into consideration, and present your own views in a way that addresses the misunderstandings that have arisen.

It is all too common for friends to avoid speaking about politics and religion out of fear of offending others and losing friendships. However, by engaging in respectful discussion you not only help foster understanding and contribute to conflict resolution, you strengthen your social ties through demonstrating your tolerance and understanding of other people's points of view.

If we can't approach our own friends and promote dialogue, what makes us think it's easier for politicians to sit at a table with their adversaries?

Haider Al-Mosawi is a blogger and social activist interested in promoting dialogue between the Muslim world and the West and addressing the misunderstandings that arise from both sides of the cultural divide. This article was written for the Common Ground News Service (CGNews).

Source: *Common Ground News Service (CGNews)*, 13 July 2010, www.commongroundnews.org

Muslims

... from page 1

the rules for "moonsighting." This could lead to the misunderstanding that Muslims are actually celebrating on 9/11. The Islamic year, based on the cycles of the moon, is 10 or 11 days shorter than our regular year, which makes the occurrence of a holiday on the anniversary of 9/11 pure coincidence. Having been overshadowed by the other two controversies, there has been little hullabaloo about this in the media.

In principle, Muslims should plan their celebrations to avoid any perception of conflict with the commemoration of 9/11. If necessary, Muslims should even consider moving public festivities (other than the ritual Eid prayer, of course) to another day. American Muslims often delay their celebrations if Eid falls in the middle of the week. Such a move, therefore, would neither be unprecedented nor out of touch with Islamic teachings. Love of God and neighbor are common elements of the Abrahamic traditions. According to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad: "None of you truly believes unless you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself." However, Muslims should not be scrutinized above other communities. Here at Notre Dame, 9/11 is also "game day." Festive mood will abound on an otherwise somber date. We will all commemorate, but "Go Irish!" and "Eid Mubarak!"

Regarding the mosque controversy, let us consider the facts. It is not a mosque, but a cultural center that will be open to members of all faiths. The building is not on Ground Zero proper, but a couple of blocks away. There has been a mosque in the neighborhood serving local Muslims for many years. There are hundreds of thousands of Muslims living in New York, including men and women in uniform, families of 9/11 victims and first responders. The Imam of the proposed center, Feisal Abdul Rauf, represents the US State Department abroad and has a niece in the Army who has served in Iraq.

Opposition to building the cultural center is deeply offensive and hurtful to American Muslims. Like their compatriots, they pay taxes, love their country and live as law-abiding citizens. Discourses that speak of Muslims as somehow violating American "sacred space" or that conflate mosques with terror and tragedy are extremely troubling. To put it into perspective, some questions that need to be asked of the detractors are: Should the mosque in downtown Washington, D.C. also be moved because of its proximity to the Pentagon? How far is far enough? If the Ground Zero "mosque" would be a front or symbol for terrorism, should mosques be allowed anywhere? Should Lower Manhattan be declared a Muslim-free zone, or should Muslim presence only be tolerated so long as they remain collectively invisible?

Fortunately, there has been a slew of support for Muslims and their right to build cultural centers and houses of worship, starting with the leadership of New York's Mayor Bloomberg (Jewish), and America's President Obama (Christian). Such support, along with the voices of countless interfaith leaders and organizations, is what makes our nation great. Ultimately, what we are witnessing says less about Islam and more about America.

This brings me to the third issue at hand--the Koran burning in Florida. It is heartwarming that many Americans have condemned this deliberately provocative act. Muslims should embrace this outpouring of support and unequivocally reject

Soccer for Peace illustrates change

By LEN and LIBBY TRAUBMAN

SOCCER FOR PEACE is a youth-example of what the future will look like. It is a living example of just how change begins successfully:

- Small
- Volunteer-based
- Bi-lingual Arabic and Hebrew
- Fun, including sports
- Social, learning excellent listening and communication skills

On **July 9-12, 2010, the annual Soccer for Peace Summer Camp** was again hosted by Soccer for Peace and the Maccabim Association. Both Hebrew and Arabic could be heard as youth experienced coexistence and began important new friendships. **Eighty girls and boys — 40 Palestinian children from Jenin, and 40 Jewish and Arab children from Israel** — met for a week of football, coexistence activities, and of course, fun.

The camp was part of a year-long program, Barkai-Jenin, of the Maccabim Association.

In honor of the World Cup, this year's soccer camp was for a full week. As part of the program, many of the Jenin children visited the seashore for the first time in their lives. While at camp, they slept at the Jewish children's homes — another first.

Expect more firsts and breakthroughs, as the citizen-to-citizen public peace process expands while instructing and empowering the government process.

For information, write to Ori@soccerforpeace.com. Photos at http://www.soccerforpeace.com/images_galleries.php Also see http://www.streetfootballworld.org/network/all-nwm/the-maccabim-association-2013-education-and-soccer-in-the-community/blog/copy_of_cross-border-coexistence-summer-camp

Our weird and wanton wars

By JIM MCCLUSKEY, *truthout* | Op-Ed

Many citizens in Britain are puzzled. Why do we always seem to be at war? How can this come about? What does it mean? At the same time, we seem to think of ourselves as a peaceful nation. In seeking answers, let us list a few notable characteristics of our current wars.

- Our wars are fought by our young men; those who enlist. The rest of us (including most of our young men) are essentially out of it - not affected - not involved - focused elsewhere.
- Most of the young men in the armed forces are from relatively poor families and have not benefited from higher education.
- The people who are killed from our side in our wars are these same young men from poor families. They have no political clout. The rest of us are at no physical risk.
- The great majority of the people who are killed in our wars are foreign civilians in poor countries. These people are of a different culture from ours. We know little or nothing about them.
- A high proportion of the foreign civilians killed in our wars are women and children. Of course, we do not experience this as though it was our own women and children who are being killed.
- The people who start the wars and direct them are middle aged and elderly politicians and senior army officers.
- The politicians and generals who start and conduct our wars are not at risk of death or physical injury; nor, generally speaking, are their offspring or other relatives.
- Our current wars are being fought in very distant lands and we citizens who pay for them know almost nothing of the vast suffering that they inflict on these far-off people.
- Our wars are fought by a rich country fielding well-armed forces with high-tech equipment against badly-equipped poor countries, the citizens of which resort to home-made bombs (improvised explosive devices or IEDs).
- After starting our wars, politicians who shared the responsibility and who subsequently appear at enquiries may speak out and contend that at the time they had doubts about the legality/wisdom/necessity/effectiveness of going to war. Similarly, the generals, after they retire, may speak out and say that at the time they had doubts about the legality/wisdom/necessity/effectiveness of going to war.
- Wars generate huge profits for individuals and corporations. The people who reap the profits are not the same people who risk their lives and lose their limbs in fighting the wars. The overall organization of those who make the profits is known as the military/industrial complex.
- There has been a cozy relationship between the military/industrial complex and the government; for example government officials may move into senior positions in arms manufacturing firms and vice versa.
- Our government encourages the flourishing of the military/industrial complex by awarding it invaluable assistance

and privileges. For example, there is a unit of 180 individuals employed within the Department of Trade and Investment whose sole work involves selling the output of British arms manufacturers to foreign governments. The salaries of these individuals are not paid by the arms manufacturers but by us citizens, the taxpayers.

- As befits a profit-focused capitalist economy, war is gradually becoming privatized. In the past, young men were dragooned into war by conscription. At present, many are presented with life choices such that the armed forces appear the best option. We are moving towards a future where making war is merely one of the services offered by the corporate sector. Consequently, the term 'mercenaries' is being superseded by 'private militaries' and 'security companies'.
- Another accelerating 'improvement' is the replacement of combatants on the battlefield with robots. In the case of the drones destroying villages in Western Pakistan, the 'combatants' can be seven thousand miles away; well out of harms way. Not so, of course, the aforementioned civilian women and children. They are more at risk than ever.
- Politicians justify their wars by claiming (often not overtly) that it gives us (them) prestige, gets our (their) feet under the top table, makes us (them) a powerful player on the world stage.

So does this short list give any clues as to why we always seem to be at war? It does seem to hint at how our physical and psychological distance from the carnage helps to sustain our self-belief as a peaceful people. The final point raises another noteworthy question. How do they (the establishment) get away with it? Here are a few suggestions.

- **Fear** - The twentieth century's most successful master of propaganda declared, "Naturally the common people don't want war. But... the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger." These are the words, at the Nuremberg Trials, of Hitler's senior henchman Herman Goering.
- **Lies** - Indispensable from time immemorial. "Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators." So said General F.S. Maude, commander of British forces in Iraq - in 1917. Blair told the British people and parliament that Hussein had weapons of mass destruction that could be deployed in 45 minutes.
- **No accountability** - Also in operation from time immemorial. Rudyard Kipling wrote in 'Epitaphs of War,' "Now all my lies are proved untrue, and I must face the men I slew, what tales shall serve me here among, mine angry and defrauded young." Kipling was mistaken. There is actually no need to worry. The worst than can happen is the Chilcot enquiry.
- **Obfuscation** - Weird language will prevent 'the little people' (to use a BP executive phrase) from knowing what is going on. Thus, those who fight back when we invade another country are 'insurgents.' When the 'Coalition of

the Willing' wants to kidnap citizens and deport them to be tortured in distant dungeons, the practice becomes 'extraordinary rendition'. When the establishment wants to bypass the Freedom of Information Act, requested documents are 'redacted'. Military speak for wiping out military targets is 'counterforce'; for wiping out cities with nuclear bombs is 'countervalue.' However, whether you are killed by 'countervalue' or a genocidal atrocity, you are just as dead.

- **Change the focus** - We are in Afghanistan to find Osama Bin-Laden and defeat Al Qaeda - No, sorry; to defeat the Taliban; - No, wait; to win hearts and minds - No; to establish democracy - No, to protect the women of Afghanistan - No; to hand over to the legitimate government. Well, it is partly legitimate anyway. The establishment wants to keep Trident renewal. So keep it out of the defense review and assess it by some separate criterion, never mind how absurd. Let's say 'value for money.' It has been estimated that the millions of people who can be killed by Trident submarines work out at about 3,600 pounds per dead person. Is this value for money? Are there cheaper ways of killing people on a genocidal scale?

These are some of the means they use to get away with it. But Herman Goering was right. The people do not want war. And the good news is they (the establishment) may not get away with it for much longer. 90 thousand leaked documents is more than just a dramatic coup. Their publication presages vast new power in the hands of 'the little people,' or (more correctly) the citizens.

Jim McCluskey is a former civil engineer and landscape architect living in the UK.

<http://www.truth-out.org/our-weird-and-wanton-wars62697>

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A New Way Forward: Rethinking U.S. Strategy In Afghanistan

By The Afghanistan Study Group

Ed note: *Connections* publishes excerpts from the Afghanistan Study Group's report in the interest of public debate. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Modesto Peace/Life Center. The full report is available at www.afghanistanstudygroup.com

The Afghanistan Study Group is an ad hoc group of public policy practitioners, former U.S. government officials, academics, business representatives, policy-concerned activists and association leaders concerned with the Obama administration's policy course in Afghanistan and to a more limited degree, Pakistan.

Afghanistan has never been pacified by foreign forces.

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger

The Study Group believes the war in Afghanistan has reached a critical crossroads. Our current path promises to have limited impact on the civil war while taking more American lives and contributing to skyrocketing taxpayer debt. We conclude that a fundamentally new direction is needed, one that recognizes the United States' legitimate interests in Central Asia and is fashioned to advance them. Far from admitting "defeat," the new way forward acknowledges the manifold limitations of a military solution in a region where our interests lie in political stability. Our recommended policy shifts our resources to focus on U.S. foreign policy strengths in concert with the international community to promote reconciliation among the warring parties, advance economic development, and encourage region-wide diplomatic engagement.

We base these conclusions on the following key points raised in the Study Group's research and discussions:

- *The United States has only two vital interests in the Af/Pak region: 1) preventing Afghanistan from being a "safe haven" from which Al Qaeda or other extremists can organize more effective attacks on the U.S. homeland; and 2) ensuring that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal does not fall into hostile hands.*

- *Protecting our interests does not require a U.S. military victory over the Taliban. A Taliban takeover is unlikely even if the United States reduces its military commitment. The Taliban is a rural insurgency rooted primarily in Afghanistan's Pashtun population, and succeeded due in some part to the disenfranchisement of rural Pashtuns. The Taliban's seizure of power in the 1990s was due to an unusual set of circumstances that no longer exist and are unlikely to be repeated.*

- *There is no significant Al Qaeda presence in Afghanistan today, and the risk of a new "safe haven" there under more "friendly" Taliban rule is overstated. Should an Al Qaeda cell regroup in Afghanistan, the U.S. would have residual military capability in the region sufficient to track and destroy it.*

- *Al Qaeda sympathizers are now present in many locations globally, and defeating the Taliban will have little effect on Al Qaeda's global reach. The ongoing threat from Al Qaeda is*

better met via specific counter-terrorism measures, a reduced U.S. military "footprint" in the Islamic world, and diplomatic efforts to improve America's overall image and undermine international support for militant extremism.

- *Given our present economic circumstances, reducing the staggering costs of the Afghan war is an urgent priority. Maintaining the long-term health of the U.S. economy is just as important to American strength and security as protecting U.S. soil from enemy (including terrorist) attacks.*

- *The continuation of an ambitious U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan will likely work against U.S. interests. A large U.S. presence fosters local (especially Pashtun) resentment and aids Taliban recruiting. It also fosters dependence on the part of our Afghan partners and encourages closer cooperation among a disparate array of extremist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan alike.*

- *Past efforts to centralize power in Afghanistan have provoked the same sort of local resistance that is convulsing Afghanistan today. There is ample evidence that this effort will join others in a long line of failed incursions.*

- *Although the United States should support democratic rule, human rights and economic development, its capacity to mold other societies is inherently limited. The costs of trying should be weighed against our need to counter global terrorist threats directly, reduce America's \$1.4 trillion budget deficit, repair eroding U.S. infrastructure, and other critical national purposes. Our support of these issues will be better achieved as part of a coordinated international group with which expenses and burdens can be shared.*

The bottom line is clear: Our vital interests in Afghanistan are limited and military victory is not the key to achieving them.

On the contrary, waging a lengthy counterinsurgency war in Afghanistan may well do more to aid Taliban recruiting than to dismantle the group, help spread conflict further into Pakistan, unify radical groups that might otherwise be quarreling amongst themselves, threaten the long-term health of the U.S. economy, and prevent the U.S. government from turning its full attention to other pressing problems.

The more promising path for the U.S. in the Af/Pak region would reverse the recent escalation and move away from a counterinsurgency effort that is neither necessary nor likely to succeed. Instead, the U.S. should:

1. **Emphasize power-sharing and political inclusion.** The U.S. should fast-track a peace process designed to decentralize power within Afghanistan and encourage a power-sharing balance among the principal parties.

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2. **Downsize and eventually end military operations in southern Afghanistan, and reduce the U.S. military footprint.** The U.S. should draw down its military presence, which radicalizes many Pashtuns and is an important aid to Taliban recruitment.

3. **Focus security efforts on Al Qaeda and Domestic Security.** Special forces, intelligence assets, and other U.S. capabilities should continue to seek out and target known Al Qaeda cells in the region. They can be ready to go after Al Qaeda should they attempt to relocate elsewhere or build new training facilities. In addition, part of the savings from our drawdown should be reallocated to bolster U.S. domestic security efforts and to track nuclear weapons globally.

4. **Encourage economic development.** Because destitute states can become incubators for terrorism, drug and human trafficking, and other illicit activities, efforts at reconciliation should be paired with an internationally-led effort to develop Afghanistan's economy.

5. **Engage regional and global stakeholders** in a diplomatic effort designed to guarantee Afghan neutrality and foster regional stability. Despite their considerable differences, neighboring states such as India, Pakistan, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia share a common interest in preventing Afghanistan from being dominated by any single power or being a permanently failed state that exports instability to others.

We believe this strategy will best serve the interests of women in Afghanistan as well. The worst thing for women is for Afghanistan to remain paralyzed in a civil war in which there evolves no organically rooted support for their social advancement.

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Myths and realities in the Afghan debate

By The Afghanistan Study Group

Myth #1: *The United States can afford to stay in Afghanistan for as long it takes to win.*

Reality: U.S. national security depends most fundamentally on our economic strength. An open-ended commitment in Afghanistan demands vast resources better used at home and for purposes that contribute effectively to our security. It depletes our military and distracts our political leadership

Yes

For JA and KK, heading to Creech

If we don't say no.

If we live in the shadow of lies and fail to name them in public.

If we see the missiles in our own backyards and avert our eyes.

If we hear, oozing out of the rotten fruit of our government offices, that every Muslim has explosives strapped to his chest; if we hear the ticker tape of our daily news mimicking the heartbeat of Pentagon policymakers; if we hear Afghan and Pakistani people described as packs of dogs tearing at each other and we don't say no.

If we hear our neighbors say:

The whole world should just give up on these countries over there! No one goes in or out for five years....PERIOD! They'd all be dead in one year, but let's let it sit for four years just to be sure! HA!

If we don't say no with our mouths, with our paintbrushes and cameras, our listserves and newspapers and magazines.

If we don't say no with our bodies by boarding planes and traveling to Afghanistan and Pakistan, by standing in Islamabad, Kabul, Lahore, by sharing tea, by exchanging smiles, opinions, ideas.

If we don't say no, there will be no chance to say yes.

— David Smith-Ferri, September, 2010

from more pressing challenges. And it adds massively to federal deficits and to the national debt, without building anything of enduring value for future generations.

Myth #2: *The Obama administration and the U.S. military have a feasible strategy and a clear timetable to end the war.*

Reality: The current strategy is not working, and the

administration has not identified the end-state it is seeking to achieve or the circumstances that would make withdrawal possible. The U.S. government emphasizes that withdrawal in summer 2011 will depend on conditions prevailing at the time. The current strategy and the stated timetable are out of synch; objectives need to be updated to realities on the ground to ensure that a drawdown in the summer of 2011 proceeds in a timely and effective manner.

Myth #3: *The "surge" in Iraq proves that counterinsurgency strategies can work; all we have to do is stay the course.*

Reality: The "surge" in Iraq was only a partial success, predicated as much on a program to pay wages to almost 100,000 Sunni that had been fighting against us as it was on an increase in troops. Conditions in Afghanistan are far more challenging. There was a reduction in violence in Iraq, but the "surge" failed to produce meaningful political reconciliation. Escalation in Afghanistan has achieved few results so far, and there is no reason to think this will change.

The effectiveness of the "surge" in Iraq depended heavily on the simultaneous political turn of the Sunnis against the counterinsurgency. Ethnic and sectarian faultlines in Afghanistan are far more complicated and tribal structures are far more fragmented than in Iraq, making a similar political turn among insurgents very remote. Political reconciliation in Afghanistan will have to proceed community by community.

Myth #4: *The Taliban is a group of religious fanatics who can never be appeased through negotiations.*

Reality: All societies contain some extremists who cannot be appeased, but they usually represent tiny minorities. Many factions within the Taliban have already shown a willingness to negotiate. They may be won over by proposals that will give them a share of political power, greater local autonomy, and the prospect of economic gain. The Taliban is not a unified movement but instead a label that is applied to many armed groups and individuals that are only loosely aligned and do not necessarily have a fondness for the fundamentalist ideology of the most prominent Taliban leaders. Participants also include a long list of tribal chiefs, militia leaders, and warlords, many of whom (including the Haqqani and Hekmatyar organizations) are a living legacy of the insurgency against the Soviets.

Myth #5: *There is no meaningful difference between the*

Taliban and Al Qaeda. They are part of a growing alliance of religious extremists that hate America and must be defeated at all costs.

Reality: Al Qaeda and the Taliban are not the same – and in fact have many differences and disagreements. The Taliban is a coalition of political-military and tribal organizations that seeks power in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda is a global terrorist organization seeking to end Western influence in the Middle East and overthrow existing Arab governments. Only Al Qaeda threatens the United States directly.

Myth #6: *If we leave Afghanistan, the Taliban will take over, Al Qaeda will re-establish itself there, and new and deadly attacks on America will be more likely.*

Reality: The Taliban are unpopular in much of Afghanistan and unlikely to take over the country. They might regain power in some areas, but Al Qaeda cannot recreate its former haven because—unlike before 9/11—the United States can easily detect and destroy bases and training sites with air power or special forces. Further, our large-scale military presence there may actually be increasing the overall danger that we face back home. Anger at U.S. military action in Central Asia inspired Faisal Shahzad, a U.S. citizen, to attempt an unsuccessful car bomb attack in Times Square. Other home-grown terrorists appear to have been inspired by similar motivations.

Myth #7: *Our large-scale presence in Afghanistan is the only thing that will ensure women's rights.*

Reality: The worst thing for women is for Afghanistan to remain paralyzed in a civil war in which there evolves no organically rooted support for their social advancement. Women's rights are central to the progress of Afghanistan, and the international community should continue to support this progress. While our proposal calls for a greatly reduced military presence, we nevertheless propose an international peacekeeping force that will be sufficient for the continuance of a number of key initiatives, including women's progress.

Myth #8: *Withdrawal from Afghanistan will be seen as a great victory for Al Qaeda and enhance its popularity and prestige. If we scale back our engagement in Afghanistan, they will simply follow us home.*

Reality: It is our military presence that is actively aiding Taliban recruitment and encouraging disparate extremist groups to back one another. The Afghan mujaheddin did not "follow the Soviets home" after they withdrew. The same will be true once the United States reduces its military footprint and eventually disengages. In fact, military disengagement will undermine Al Qaeda's claims that the United States is trying to "dominate" the Muslim world. A smaller U.S. footprint in the Muslim world will make Americans safer, not encourage terrorist attacks against American targets at home and abroad.

Myth #9: *The U.S. scaling back its military mission in Afghanistan will threaten Pakistan's stability and jeopardize control of its nuclear arsenal.*

The indefensible drones: a Ground Zero reflection

By KATHY KELLY

Libby and Jerica are in the front seat of the Prius, and Mary and I are in back. We just left Oklahoma, we're heading into Shamrock, Texas, and tomorrow we'll be Indian Springs, Nevada, home of Creech Air Force Base. We've been discussing our legal defense.

The state of Nevada has charged Libby and me, along with twelve others, with criminal trespass onto the base. On April 9, 2009, after a ten-day vigil outside the air force base, we entered it with a letter we wanted to circulate among the base personnel, describing our opposition to a massive targeted assassination program. Our trial date is set for September 14.

Creech is one of several homes of the U.S. military's aerial drone program. U.S. Air Force personnel there pilot surveillance and combat drones, unmanned aerial vehicles with which they are instructed to carry out extrajudicial killings in Afghanistan and Iraq. The different kinds of drone include the "Predator" and the "Reaper." The Obama administration favors a combination of drone attacks and Joint Special Operations raids to pursue its stated goal of eliminating whatever Al Qaeda presence exists in these countries. As the U.S. accelerates this campaign, we hear from UN special rapporteur for extrajudicial executions, Philip Alston, who suggests that U.S. citizens may be asleep at the wheel, oblivious to clear violations of international law which we have real obligations to prevent (or at the very least discuss). Many citizens are now focused on the anniversary of September 11th and the controversy over whether an Islamic Center should be built near Ground Zero. Corporate media does little to help ordinary U.S. people understand that the drones which hover over potential targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen create small "ground zeroes" in multiple locales on an everyday basis.

Conversation switches to whatever CD has just come on... Tinny music and rural Texan countryside blend together.

My thoughts drift to the Emergency Surgical Center for Victims of War, in Kabul. A little over two months ago, Josh and I met Nur Said, age 11, in the hospital's ward for young boys injured by various explosions. Most of the boys welcomed a diversion from the ward's tedium, and they were especially eager to sit outside, in the hospital garden, where they'd form a circle and talk together for hours. Nur Said stayed indoors. Too miserable to talk, he'd merely nod at us, his hazel eyes welling up with tears. Weeks earlier, he had been part of a hardy band of youngsters that helped bolster their family incomes by searching for scrap metal and unearthing land mines on a mountainside in Afghanistan.

Finding an unexploded land mine was a eureka for the children because, once opened, the valuable brass parts could be extracted and sold. Nur had a land mine in hand when it suddenly exploded, ripping four fingers off his right hand and blinding him in his left eye.

On a sad continuum of misfortune, Nur and his companions fared better than another group of youngsters scavenging for scrap metal in the Kunar Province on August 26th.

Following an alleged Taliban attack on a nearby police station, NATO forces flew overhead to "engage" the militants. If the engagement includes bombing the area under scrutiny, it would be more apt to say that NATO aimed to purge the militants. But in this case, the bombers mistook the children for militants and killed six of them, aged 6 to 12. Local police said there were no Taliban at the site during the attack, only children.

General Petraeus assures his superiors that the U.S. is effectively using drone surveillance, sensors and other robotic means of gaining intelligence to assure that they are hunting down the right targets for assassination. But survivors of these attacks insist that civilians are at risk. In Afghanistan, thirty high schools have shut down because the parents say that their children are distracted by the drones flying overhead and that it's unsafe for them to gather in the schools.

I think of Nur, trapped in his misery, at the Emergency surgical center. He'll be one among many thousands of amputees whose lives are forever altered by the war and poverty that afflict his country. Many of these survivors are likely to feel intense hatred toward their persecutors. 300 villagers in the Sayed Abad district of Wardak province took to the streets in protest on August 12, following an alleged U.S. night raid. "They murdered three students and detained five others," one of the protesters said. "All of them were civilians." Villagers, shocked by the killing, shouted that they didn't want Americans in Afghanistan. According to village eyewitnesses, American troops stormed into a family home and shot three brothers, all young men, and then took their father into custody. One of the young men was a student who had returned to the family home to celebrate the traditional "iftar" fast at the beginning of Ramadan. Local policemen are investigating the allegations, and NATO recently conceded that they may have killed some civilians. (see www.vcnv.org Afghanistan Atrocities update).

The drones feed hourly intelligence information to U.S. war commanders, but the machinery can't inform people about the spiraling anger as the U.S. conducts assassination operations in countries throughout the 1.3 billion-strong

Muslim world. "Sold as defending Americans," writes Fred Branfman, "(it) is actually endangering us all. Those responsible for it, primarily General Petraeus, are recklessly seeking short-term tactical advantage while making an enormous long-term strategic error that could lead to countless American deaths in the years and decades to come."

The Prius is comfortable, but my side of the backseat has become a makeshift office. The most important file contains Bill Quigley's comprehensive argumentation as to why the court should allow us to present a necessity defense based on international law. Bill is the Legal Director for the Center for Constitutional Rights. On September 14, we want to call on him as an expert witness. We and our co-defendants have chosen to mount a *pro se* defense to try to persuade our judge that far from committing a crime we have exercised our rights and our duties, under international and U.S. law, to try to prevent one and to raise public opposition to usage of drones in "targeted" assassinations.

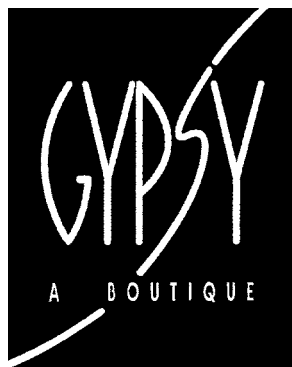
Jerica hands me the questions we can use to elicit Bill's testimony. We try to word our questions so that the evidence will be admissible in court. "Could Bill please inform the court about citizen's responsibilities under international law, could he explain to the court what articles and statutes we will be invoking?" To a layperson, it seems like an elaborate game of "Mother May-I," and we haven't even started developing questions to ask Col. Ann Wright, the former U.S. diplomat, who had helped re-open the U.S. Embassy in Kabul shortly before resigning her job in a refusal to cooperate with buildup toward the May 2003 U.S. Shock and Awe invasion of Iraq.

Rounding out our trio of expert witnesses is former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark. We hope his personal experience within the U.S. government might arouse the court's more careful attention to the seldom-discussed legal issues that are fundamentally at stake here. However, the judge has already indicated that his calendar only allots one day for our trial.

Libby, Jerica, Mary and I have blocked out at least ten days, inclusive of travel, for our small contribution to an ongoing effort of people around the world working to put drones on trial. We're in New Mexico now. I feel cramped and restless, and I wonder if Tucumcari, where we plan to stop for lunch, has internet. We can't possibly bring the testimony of Afghans and Pakistanis to court this Tuesday. Their testimony, borne on bodies scarred and mutilated and harbored in memories of nightmare, will never be given away and cannot be given in court. Extrajudicial killings are killings without rule of law, without trial. Few if any Afghan or Pakistani civilian survivors of U.S. wars will ever travel to a U.S. court of law for consideration of their grievances.

And at this moment I realize that if we were four Afghans or Pakistanis or Iraqis traveling in a war zone, we'd have spent this entire trip watching not the Southwestern landscape, but the skies.

Kathy Kelly is co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence. Email her at kathy@vcnv.org <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/09/09-0> slightly edited



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Sarah Haskett: poet and teacher

I've been writing poetry ever since I was a child, surrounded as I was by writers like my mom and dad. The passion of both parents was easily adopted, and poetry soon melded into an outlet: for thoughts, emotions, connections. Starting in high school, I began entering poems into Modesto Poet's Corner. My first was published in 9th grade, and I remember feeling so "adult" as I stood up among fellow poets to read aloud. Since then, I've been recognized several more times, including the last four straight years.



As a high school English teacher, I find it important to continue to write, in order to be a role model for my students, as well as to inspire and create. Much of my inspiration to write poetry comes from my students, from the classrooms—from the turbulence and success that face each of us every day. Although I am often critical and sarcastic in my educational poems, it is merely because I want something better for our students than what we currently have. If I am an activist for anything, it's for equality, safety, and progressivism in the classroom.

I've been involved in Academic Advisory, Academic Boosters, and an impressive program called Rachel's Challenge, which encourages students to break barriers and defy stereotypes. Our students need inspiring teachers who are strong enough to be human beings with their students and break down the wall of stiff formality. Our students need teachers who are willing to change what doesn't work and look for something new, not just hope those blank faces will catch up someday. I'm so frustrated by teachers who hate teenagers, by teachers who refuse to change bad practices. Teaching is educational Darwinism—only those who adapt will have students who survive. And that is my goal: to create students who can survive and adapt in the unknowable future.

Not as I Do

I will have to fix
your children
in ten years, when they
saunter into my classroom,
spitting game, sexting,
staring sulkily at challenges.
Because you spent all their time,
a cool Bud in hand,
fast-forwarding Tivo,
concerned more with voting
for an American idol.

Young eyes
watch you curse and condescend
overwhelmed waitresses,
and young minds
suffer as you
ignore their oh-so-trivial problems—
eyeing the Raiders last 3 minutes
as young arms reach for you
shows them their lives
don't matter,
since you always
have more pressing concerns.

Know
that you
are teaching them, too.
Words and attitudes
resurface
in the glazed back row
of my class.

Checkmate

The District likes multiple-choice tests—
black-versus-white,
wrong-versus-right.
That is how they evaluate
every student at the end of
every semester.

The chessboard is laid out,
pawns set in place—
each advised they are receiving the same opportunities
to lose.

The District slides across the board,
slaps the timer,
stares Bobby Fischer eyes
at the newbies.

The pawns make their moves: A, B, C, or D.
There are no grey areas—
only perfectly-bordered squares
which the students must stay inside
in order to win.

Once the pieces
have fallen,
the District knows
which students are really learning
and which teachers are truly teaching.

And the best part is—
they can play
thousands of games this way.

Thoughts from the Underappreciated

I love demanding your attention
by having to repeat myself 16 times
Because I do have such a beautiful voice
that never strains
nor tires.

I love writing comments on each paper,
sacrificing weekend freedom,
only to watch you crumple it
after looking at the grade,
which, of course, matters most.
Duh.

Because I have an endless supply of minutes,
nothing better to do than
read and comment and flourish and cramp.
Teachers aren't human anyway.
Why would I need time to eat at your restaurants
and be seen in your public?

I love reaching out to help
only to see you quench your thirst for advice
with alcohol.

Because I know—I'm the crazy one.
Drinking with friends
will bring you more success and happiness,
not an overworked liver and an
under-worked sense of self-respect.

And I love realizing
that everyone already has the answers
and doesn't need me.

Because my spirit definitely can never
be crumpled.



Myths and realities

. . . from page 7

Reality: A prolonged and unwinnable war is more likely to undermine stability in Pakistan than would the prompt scaling down of the U.S. military mission. There are many other steps that the United States could take to help secure Pakistan's nuclear arsenal that would be far less expensive and more effective than keeping a large military force in Afghanistan.

Fortunately, the danger of a radical takeover of the Pakistani government is small. Islamist extremism in Pakistan is concentrated within the tribal areas in its northwest frontier, and largely confined to its Pashtun minority (which comprises about 15 percent of the population). The Pakistani army is primarily Punjabi (roughly 44 percent of the population) and remains loyal. At present, therefore, this second strategic interest is not seriously threatened.

Myth #10: Reducing the military effort in Afghanistan will cause allies to doubt our credibility and staying power. Some might even be tempted to cut deals with our adversaries.

Reality: Public support for the allied mission in Afghanistan is lagging in almost all partner countries. The

United States will strengthen its credibility among allies by coming forward with a realistic and pragmatic strategy for scaling back and eventually ending the mission. With some NATO countries already heading for the exit, a U.S. aimed at eventual departure is more likely to keep the coalition intact than one that aims at unrealizable objectives. The U.S. will gain the most credibility with our allies from making decisions that are recognized as wise, even if they represent a change in direction.

Myth #11: If the Obama administration scales back the mission in Afghanistan, Republicans will portray it as "soft" and the Democratic Party will pay a big political price in the 2010 and 2012 elections.

Reality: Our strategy in Afghanistan should be based on U.S. national interests, not partisan politics. Moreover, the war is increasingly unpopular with the American people. Voters will support a strategy that reduces costs, emphasizes counter-terrorism, and begins to bring U.S. troops home.

Visit www.afghanistanstudygroup.com

"Should any American soldier be so base and infamous as to injure any [prisoner]. . . I do most earnestly enjoin you to bring him to such severe and exemplary punishment as the enormity of the crime may require. Should it extend to death itself, it will not be disproportional to its guilt at such a time and in such a cause... for by such conduct they bring shame, disgrace and ruin to themselves and their country."

— George Washington, charge to the Northern Expeditionary Force, Sept. 14, 1775

Muslims

. . . from page 4

rash responses that may take place in their name. This is an opportunity for Muslims to fall back on the highest of virtues to be found in their religious tradition. Contrary to popular belief, the Koran exhorts Muslims to respond to provocations with kindness, "so that enmity might transform into loving friendship." (41:34) The Prophet Muhammad is also reported to have said: "The most virtuous behavior is to engage those who sever relations, to give to those who withhold from you, and to forgive those who wrong you."

Since the 9/11 attacks, a faulty narrative has prevailed about Islam and the U.S.-led war on terror that has tacitly maligned all Muslims as guilty by association. No amount of information or serious analysis has been able to alter this perception. The fact that Muslims have been issuing condemnations of terrorism ad nauseum, or that polls have shown that Muslims (including Saudis and Iranians) are no more likely to justify the killing of innocents than ordinary Americans, has done little or nothing to lift the shadow of suspicion from the collective body of Muslims. However, in the face of unprecedented and overwhelming support amidst the recent controversies, there is reason to believe that change is in the air. It is happening with the mainstreaming of Muslims in American society. As we mourn the losses of a decade ago, from the depths of the dark abyss that was 9/11, I see glimmers of hope.

Mahan Mirza is an assistant professor of Arabic and Islamic studies in the Department of Classics and is also a fellow of the Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies. Contact him at mmirza@nd.edu

This piece originally ran in the September edition of The Observer, the independent student newspaper serving the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College. The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Observer. Reprinted with permission.

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"Palestinian Gandhi" convicted for protesting; U.S. silent

BY ROBERT NAIMAN

Just Foreign Policy, 8/27/2010

This week, an Israeli military court convicted Abdallah Abu Rahmah, whom progressive Zionists have called a "Palestinian Gandhi," of "incitement" and "organizing and participating in illegal demonstrations" for organizing protests against the confiscation of Palestinian land by the "Apartheid Wall" in the village of Bilin in the West Bank, following an eight month trial, during which he was kept in prison.

The European Union issued a protest. But as far as I am aware, no U.S. official has said anything and no U.S. newspaper columnist has denounced this act of repression; indeed, the U.S. press **hasn't even reported the news**. To find out what happened, someone could search the wires where they'll find this AFP story, or go to the British or Israeli press.

AFP reported:

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton expressed deep concern "that the possible imprisonment of Mr. Abu Rahma is intended to prevent him and other Palestinians from exercising their legitimate right to protest against the existence of the separation barriers in a non-violent manner," her office said.

"The EU considers the route of the barrier where it is built on Palestinian land to be illegal," it quoted her as saying in a statement.

The failure of the *New York Times* to report the news is particularly striking, because the *New York Times* reported last August on the protests in Bilin, quoting Abu Rahmah in particular; and because this July *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, writing from Bilin with the provocative headline "Waiting for Gandhi," weighed in on the subject of

Palestinian nonviolent protest.

Last August, Ethan Bronner reported in the *Times*:

Abdullah Abu Rahma, a village teacher and one of the organizers of the weekly protests, said he was amazed at the military's assertions [of protester violence, including of "rioters" throwing "Molotov cocktails"] as well as at its continuing arrests and imprisonment of village leaders.

"They want to destroy our movement because it is nonviolent," he said. He added that some villagers might have tried, out of frustration, to cut through the fence since the court had ordered it moved and nothing had happened. But that is not the essence of the popular movement that he has helped lead.

Kristof wrote patronizingly in his column last month that "some Palestinians are dabbling in a strategy of nonviolent resistance," but it seems that Kristof was "dabbling" in his fleeting expression of concern about the fate of the Palestinians.

Under the "law" of the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian West Bank since 1967, "incitement" is defined as "the attempt, verbally or otherwise, to influence public opinion in the Area in a way that may disturb the public peace or public order", and carries a maximum 10 year sentence. Abu Rahmah's sentencing will take place next month, and the prosecution is reportedly expected to ask for a sentence of at least two years.

In December 2008 Abdallah received the Carl Von Ossietzky Medal for Outstanding Service in the Realization of Basic Human Rights from the International League for Human Rights in Berlin, as Amnesty International noted following his arrest.

This February, former President Jimmy Carter wrote on behalf of the Elders, the group of global leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela to promote peace:

We are especially concerned to hear that Abdallah Abu Rahma, the coordinator of the Popular Committee against the Wall and

Settlements in Bil'in, was detained in a night raid on 10 December last year and faces charges of incitement, stone throwing and organizing and participating in illegal marches. [...] Abu Rahma is a middle-aged school teacher who eschews violence including stone throwing.

Catherine Ashton, Europe's Hillary Clinton, protested the conviction. Why hasn't Hillary done so?

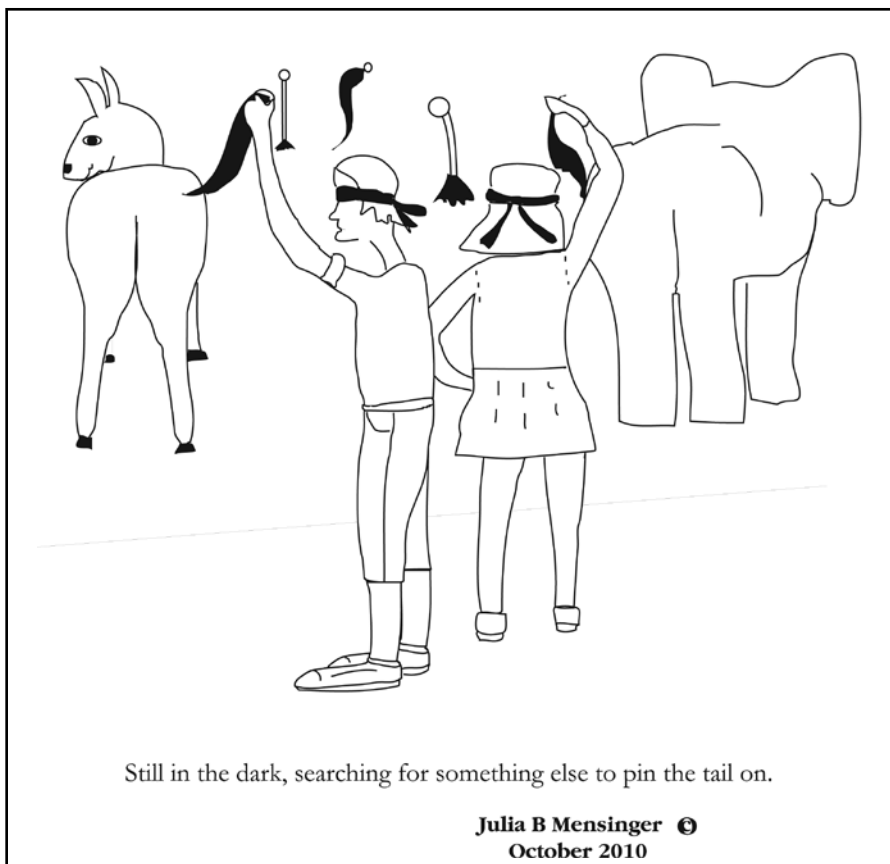
Perhaps the failure of the U.S. media to **simply report the news** might have something to do with it?

You can ask Secretary of State Clinton to speak out, as Europe's Catherine Ashton has, by calling the State Department's comment line at 202-647-6575.

Or you can use the State Department's web form, choosing "E-mail a Question/Comment," and topic "U.S. Foreign Policy/Middle East." You could use a subject like "Conviction by Israeli court of Abdallah Abu Rahmah for nonviolent protest," and a question like "I urge Secretary Clinton and other State Department officials to speak out against the conviction by Israeli military court of Abdallah Abu Rahmah for organizing nonviolent protests against the Israeli separation barrier in the West Bank, which has confiscated Palestinian land."

You can write a letter for publication to the *New York Times*, letters@nytimes.com; you can contact the Times' news editors, nytnews@nytimes.com.

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