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Cut all US military aid to Israel

John Dear S.J. | Jun. 8, 2010 On the Road to Peace

When my mind turns to Israel and Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza, the hatred and the bullets, the dead children -- and now the assault on the Peace Flottilla -- I can't quite keep down the question: Where is God?

With God, it seems, our senses fail us. In a world made dark by our own doing, God strikes us, to borrow from Daniel Berrigan, as "the God of no comment." Especially among those who toil to bring to the world a measure of light.

This is not to suggest that I think God is absent or inert or impassive. Quite the contrary. God, I believe, is present and has strong opinions and, moreover, applies divine energies for the disarmament of every nation and every human heart.

An audacious proposition. God works for disarmament? How to know for sure? There is no way to know as a scientist reckons knowledge. Rather to make a commitment for peace, one must, as the Bible says, *believe*. And I believe in part because of the psalms and the prophets.

For instance, when the Israelites clamored for a polity like the nations around them -- a robust kingdom -- the prophet Samuel solemnly warned them: If you submit to a kingdom you will open yourselves to the inevitabilities of a vainglorious court -- a standing army and a warfare economy. And he paints a harrowing picture.

"The king will take the best of your fields and vineyards ? and give them to his courtiers. He will appoint some to ? make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots." And on top of that, certain conscription: "He will take your sons and appoint them to ? be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots." Military adventurism, men taken away from their families, bloodshed and casualties -- and the court drinking choice wine from goblets. "These will be the ways of the king. ?" (1 Samuel 8).

Many psalms join in. They concede the (by now) long entrenched kingship. But they rail still at the kings' macho rush toward war. "A king is not saved by a mighty army, nor a warrior delivered by great strength." And: "Useless is the warhorse for safety; its great strength is no sure escape."

The promises of the kingdom are dimly viewed. The psalms and the prophets hold high a contrary vision, the vision of *shalom*. From Psalm 34: "Seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and God's ears are open to their cry."

"Seek peace and pursue it." No abstraction as we take it today. It means simply: each nation lay down its weapons, entrust your security to God, reconcile with one another, create justice and live within the social boundaries of nonviolence.

But not yet, it seems. The world remains at war or in numb preparation for war. Accordingly, the God of *shalom* , I believe, continues to work in our midst, leading us to disarm the nations, trying still to disarm our hearts. God

is giving us a gift, if we would welcome it, the gift of *shalom*.

Here, to me, is an inspiring vision. And many today work to realize it, beginning with the disarmament of the United States. We insist that the nation put an end to throwing our trillions to the foul winds of weapons and war. A demand not only of the U.S. but of its acolytes around the world. Including Israel.

Last Monday the ways of the nations were put on display in Israel as Israeli masked commandos stormed a peace flotilla at 4 a.m. in international waters. I support the peace flotilla, which aims to break the evil blockade on Gaza like the Civil Rights' Freedom Riders broke our evil segregation laws. But with millions I mourn that the soldiers opened fire, killing nine -- some, including 19-year-old American Furkan Dogan, at point-blank range.

As a member of the Free Gaza movement, I returned a few months ago after an attempt to get aid, overland, into Gaza. The attempt was foiled, and it goaded me all the more to vehemently demand an end to the Israeli repression of the Palestinians, an end to the siege of Gaza, an end to Israeli apartheid. And not just an end to things but a beginning -- a beginning of the pursuit of *shalom* and the God of *shalom*.

Such a beginning means a cut of all U.S. military aid to Israel. Immediately.

Congress is now debating the Obama Administration's war budget, which includes an increase of $3.2 billion in aid -- military aid -- for Israel. As Josh Ruebner recently wrote in the Huffington Post, "this requested increase in U.S. weapons to Israel -- part of a ten-year $30 billion agreement signed between the two countries in 2007 -- qualifies on both counts as a program that the United States can't afford and that doesn't work in establishing a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians."

It's an unjust budget that mustn't pass. We need to pressure our politicians -- at least as much as the Israeli lobby -- to end military aid and so drain Israel of its means to maintain apartheid. From there begin a negotiated peace, one that seeks justice, human rights and sufficient land for all.

The time has come to end the exorbitant expense of occupation and war and put it toward funding *shalom*. Medea Benjamin of Codepink, and a Free Gaza leader, wrote last week:

> People the world over are calling for an end to the siege that since 2006 has made life miserable for the 1.5 million inhabitants of Gaza, most of whom are under 18. They are calling for accountability for Operation Cast Lead, Israel's 22-day military assault of Gaza in 2009 that left over 1,400 dead, thousands wounded and countless homes, schools and businesses destroyed. They are calling on Israel to open the borders so that people can get medical treatment or import the building materials they need to rebuild their shattered lives.
>
> This is why efforts like the Freedom Flotilla are so critical. They not only bring aid, but they show that the world has not abandoned the Palestinians in Gaza. UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Richard?Falk, noting the world governments' failure to help the people of Gaza, cited nonviolent grassroots campaigns such as the flotilla as "the only meaningful current challenge to Israel's violations of its obligations as the Occupying Power of the Gaza Strip under the Geneva Conventions and the United Nations Charter."

Jewish Voice for Peace writes this:

> The U.S. funding that pays for the guns and ammunition, F-16 bombers, and Apache helicopters that are used to carry out Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and people serves neither Israelis, Palestinians,

> nor Americans. In short, Israel cannot build a society based on the principles of democracy, human rights, and compliance with international law while brutally occupying another people and their land. The United States is currently paying for that occupation with its annual aid. That's why [we] urge the U.S. government to suspend military aid to Israel until Israel ends its 37-year occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

Many groups are now working to implement the July 2005 Palestinian call for "boycotts, divestment and sanctions" against Israel (see: www.bdsmovement.net).

Some friends suggest that since Israel has an embargo on all food and medicine to the people of Gaza, the U.S. should place an embargo on all weapons and funding for war on Israel.

Ironically, hope for Gaza can be found in Israel's ancient psalms. "The young lions [read: warmongers] suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the ways of the God of peace lack no good thing" (Psalm 34:10).

Let us return to the God of *shalom* who first envisioned a world of nonviolent, peaceful coexistence as sisters and brothers. May that God of peace bless us as we seek justice and disarmament through every avenue of steadfast nonviolent resistance.

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Editor's Note: Congratulations to Jesuit fathers John Dear and Dan Berrigan. *The Essential Writings of Daniel Berrigan*," edited by John Dear was received Second Place in the category Spirituality Books ? Soft Cover from the Catholic Press Association. The award were announced June 4 during the Catholic Media Convention in New Orleans.

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To contribute to Catholic Relief Services' "Fr. John Dear Haiti Fund," go to: http://donate.crs.org/goto/fatherjohn. John will speak this weekend in Washington, D.C. at the Tikkun conference (www.tikkun.org), and on "Gandhi, King and Day," at Loyola in Chicago, June 25-26 in Chicago (see: www.asrenewal.org), and teach a weeklong course, "Gandhi, King, Day and Merton," Aug. 2-6, at Ghost Ranch Center, Abiquiu, NM, see www.ghostranch.org. John's latest book, Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings (Orbis), along with other recent books, A Persistent Peace and Put Down Your Sword, as well as Patricia Normile's John Dear On Peace, are available from www.amazon.com. For further information, or to schedule a lecture, go to www.johndear.org.

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