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Why make a peacemaking mission to Afghanistan?

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

Peacemaking, to paraphrase Fyodor Dostoyevsky, is "a harsh and dreadful thing."

This week, I'm flying to Kabul, Afghanistan, on a long-planned, hopeful yet modest mission of peace. I've been looking for a way to get to Afghanistan for the last 12 years. I remember speaking out against the impending U.S. bombing of Afghanistan in September 2001* at a rally in Greenwich Village, New York, and again, just after the U.S. war began in October 2001*, in Times Square. In January 2003, I spoke against our war in Afghanistan and our impending war on Iraq at the large mobilization in front of the U.S. Capitol to 300,000 people. Since then, I've been denouncing this war, organizing demonstrations, speaking with politicians, even getting arrested in acts of civil disobedience. With Archbishop Desmond Tutu, I tried -- and came close -- to meeting with President Barack Obama about it. But most of all, I've wanted to go there myself.

So this week, I fly to the other side of the world, to one of the poorest places on the planet, where 2 million people have been killed in warfare in the last four decades. I'm going, basically, for three reasons.

First of all, I've been invited to Afghanistan by the Afghan Peace Volunteers, a group of young people who study and practice nonviolence in Kabul, to join their Dec. 10 day of peace. As some might know, these young people are part of a community education center in Kabul, and like the rest of us, try to practice peace and nonviolence. They have all lost loved ones because of our war, and continue to live and suffer in danger. (Read about them at Voices of Creative Nonviolence's website.)

My dear friend Kathy Kelly has spent much of this year living with the Peace Volunteers in Kabul. She has told me great things about their efforts to live the life of peace and nonviolence in the midst of poverty and war. Recently, I wrote about their effort to get 2 million people to sign on and declare friendship with the people of Afghanistan. They are trying to counter the grim statistic of 2 million

Afghans killed in war over the last four decades.

I do not go to Afghanistan necessarily to say anything, do anything or accomplish anything, except to offer the hand of friendship and peace -- and to listen. My dear friends Mairead Maguire, the Nobel peace laureate from Belfast, Northern Ireland; Ann Wright, the former U.S. embassy official in Kabul turned peace activist; and evangelical author and speaker Shane Claiborne will join me in Kabul.

Second, I'm going to Afghanistan as a way to say, once again, a public no to this senseless, illegal, immoral, impractical, evil U.S. war, the longest in our nation's history. About 2,000 U.S. soldiers have needlessly died in Afghanistan since 2001, but how many tens of thousands of Afghan civilians have died? And who cares?

One would never know our war upon the children of Afghanistan continues; it was hardly ever mentioned in the presidential campaign.

Bombing Afghanistan, filling their skies with our drones, stealing their land, exerting our imperial muscle -- these actions can never lead to peace. This imperial warfare only further terrorizes the populace, turns millions against the United States, makes the Taliban stronger and ensures further terrorist violence against us. It also bankrupts us. We can't afford this war.

But of course, few people in the U.S. government or military care about the children and young people of Afghanistan. This war is about taking their land and using it for future military bases and warfare against China. It's about the U.S. oil pipeline that we are dying -- rather, killing -- to build. And it's about money -- the weapons manufacturers and military leaders make a fortune by killing Afghan children; they guarantee not our security, but their own job security.

Through this war, we have become the global terrorists we theoretically oppose.

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We need to continue to denounce this war, protest it, organize against it, speak out against it and demand that the Obama administration end it immediately. The U.S. should stop its drone attacks, stop its aerial bombardments, remove all its military and military advisers, and make serious reparations for the harm we have caused countless millions.

The third reason why I'm going to Afghanistan is to obey Jesus' commandment in the Sermon on the Mount to love your enemies. I want to practice that unconditional, nonviolent love he calls us to live.

I have long struggled to take Jesus at his word, even as most Christians actively renounce that word and oppose his way of peace. It's important to remember that when Jesus commands us to practice *agape* toward our enemies, he's actually using "nation-state" language. He's not referring to an unpleasant neighbor who lives across the street (he talks about that elsewhere) or, for that matter, a difficult boss or in-law. He wants us to show unconditional, non-retaliatory, sacrificial, nonviolent love to those being targeted by our nation-state. These days, that means, first of all, the people of Afghanistan. I'm going to Kabul to offer a loving, nonviolent presence to the Afghan peace volunteers and those I meet, come what may, in discipleship to the nonviolent Jesus.

The question is: How do we love our enemies? How do we love the people whom our nation is killing? Anyone who claims to be a Christian needs to grapple with such questions. I cannot remember a time

