

Haiti, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Obama

January 15, 2010: *Catastrophe in Haiti, escalation in Afghanistan, new threats against Yemen, Israeli siege of Gaza tightens...and Obama's been in office a year now. Yikes.*

Dear Friends,

The grim news from Haiti gets worse by the day and by the hour. Everything we can do should and must be done - in the short term, fundraising and support for emergency mobilizations of doctors, rescue workers and emergency response teams should be supported. In the medium and long term, we need to stand ready to challenge those who would take advantage of the catastrophe to impose what Naomi Klein has so memorably identified as the "shock doctrine" in Haiti, setting the stage for the disaster to become permanent.

In fact, the Heritage Foundation unapologetically [called for](#) such a plan, describing how "the U.S. response to the tragic earthquake in Haiti earthquake offers opportunities to reshape Haiti's long-dysfunctional government and economy as well as to improve the public image of the United States in the region." When Heritage realized the impact of saying this as thousands or tens of thousands of Haitians lay dead and dying, they deleted those words from the website.

It isn't easy to continue our "regular" work - so much of which is crisis-driven already - in the face of such catastrophic human suffering. But the escalating wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the threats against Yemen, the squeezing of Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip...none of them stopped for the earthquake in Haiti. Nor can we.

So we continue, even as we look for ways to help the beleaguered people of Haiti

Yemen

It doesn't look good. The United States punished Yemen 20 years ago by cutting off aid. Today, the United States is punishing Yemen by sending aid. I wrote in a new [article](#) in *The Huffington Post* that Barack Obama isn't the first U.S. president to find Yemen a challenge. And the current \$70 million package of military and security assistance isn't the first \$70 million U.S. aid program to Yemen.

Two decades ago, then-President George H.W. Bush was preparing for his looming invasion of Iraq - what would become Operation Desert Storm. Like his son in 2002, Bush was eager to force a unanimous vote in the United Nations Security Council endorsing his war. But unlike George Junior, who abandoned the UN when the Council stood defiant against his illegal war, the first Bush was willing to pay - in expensive bribes and political concessions - to win what the great Pakistani scholar Eqbal Ahmad called "a multilateral fig-leaf for a unilateral war."

To read the rest of the article, click [here](#). (I hope you'll also leave a comment - it helps make my pieces on Huffington Post more visible...)

Afghanistan

My new book, written with my longtime friend and colleague David Wildman, has just been released, and I hope all of you will get a copy. [Interlink Publishing](#) will also make it available in bulk - if you buy 10 copies or more, you can get 40 percent off, sell the books, and use the money saved to support your organization's peace and justice work.

Opposition to the Afghanistan war, which had risen to almost 60 percent, diminished after Obama's West Point speech explaining his intention to send more than 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. As I mentioned in my [assessment](#) of his speech, there was one way in which Obama's escalation speech brought significant relief to the 59 percent of people in this country, as well as the overwhelming majorities of people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East and elsewhere who oppose the U.S. war in Afghanistan: It was a pretty lousy speech. But we still have a huge amount of educating to do, providing people with the basic information they need to convince others of why the war is wrong and must be ended. The key issues will be the costs - human and economic - of this

terrible and rising war. And at this particular moment, even beyond the human costs in Afghanistan and here at home, the economic costs stand out. It should be pretty easy for us to convince people that the \$30 BILLION or more it will cost just to send those additional 30,000 troops would be far better spent on creating hundreds of thousands of new green jobs.

But we need the information to do it - and I hope David's and my book will help.

In Gaza

We're getting very close to the February 5th date for the UN General Assembly to consider whether Israel and the Palestinians have met the requirements outlined in the Goldstone Report, to investigate their own culpability for war crimes in Gaza during Israel's assault last year. It's not likely to lead, at least immediately, to a serious UN move to hold anyone accountable in the International Criminal Court or anywhere else. But the responsibilities of the Goldstone Report now include obligations for us - for civil society - as well as for governments.

And with the return home of the extraordinary internationals who traveled to Egypt to break the siege of Gaza, we turn to what Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Territory, calls "the legitimacy war," in which civil society will play the role governments and the UN are unable or unwilling to play. Egyptian collaboration with Israel's siege, as well as its dependence on U.S. support, meant that Egypt kept the Free Gaza Marchers from entering Gaza. But they return energized and educated about the reality of the situation on the ground, and will be important assets for our work in the coming period.

That means we need to continue delegitimizing Israel's occupation and apartheid policies, most urgently the crippling siege of Gaza, right now well into its third year. The global BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) campaign of nonviolent economic pressure to force Israel to end its violations of international law is winning [important victories](#). Corporations are changing their practices, trade unions are refusing to handle Israeli goods - lots of work is underway to demand an end to profiting from occupation. And here in the U.S., there is a growing challenge to the \$30 billion in military aid Obama agreed to send to Israel over the next 10 years. Wouldn't most people in this country prefer to spend that money on health care, green jobs, and dealing with climate change, rather than enabling Israel to [commit](#) more war crimes with weapons marked "Made in the USA"? I urge you all to check out the amazing resources on the website of the [U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation](#) to join these efforts.

Obama's First Year

And finally, President Obama. His administration has been in office for almost a year now, and many of the sky-high hopes that swept him into office have been dashed. There are a few discrete accomplishments, some of which may turn out to be important, but Obama has failed to deliver on fundamental challenges where real change was promised - things like *real* health care reform, *real* green jobs, and *real* climate change action.

As for the wars - while the Obama administration is so far fulfilling the letter, if not the spirit, of the Bush-negotiated withdrawal plan from Iraq, we are already hearing from Secretary of Defense Gates and others that there are talks already underway to insure that U.S. troops remain in Iraq even after the end of 2011, supposedly the date for the "final" withdrawal of "all" U.S. troops from that country. The Afghanistan war is escalating, and there are new drone strikes in Pakistan. And now, Yemen. The UN has just reported that civilian casualties in Afghanistan were higher in 2009 than any earlier year of the U.S. war. This seems to be the Obama-as-president version of the Obama-as-candidate promise to not only end the war in Iraq, but "end the mindset that leads to war."

IPS just issued its [one-year report card](#) for Obama and his administration. We gave him a barely passing C-minus. And the lowest grades were those in war and peace.

We have a lot of work to do.

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